

**NEGOTIATING THE PARADOXES OF POVERTY:
PRESIDENTIAL RHETORIC ON WELFARE FROM JOHNSON TO CLINTON**

A Dissertation

by

MARTIN CARCASSON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2004

Major Subject: Speech Communication

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To Tracee, Gabriela, and Cameron

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is one of the most controversial and complicated social issues in the United States. Both the existence of poverty as well as the efforts to combat it challenge the nation's ideals of freedom, equality, compassion, family, work, individualism, and justice, and often putting them into conflict. Poverty represents the intersection of many of America's most highly charged areas of political dispute, including inequalities of race, gender, and class; education, labor, housing, tax, and immigration policy; globalization and the impact of economic transformations; the benefits and flaws of capitalism; the "breakdown" of the traditional family; the separation of religion and government; the deterioration of the urban center; and the disputed role of the state in addressing these various difficulties.

Due to its inherent complexity and broad scope, the study of poverty transcends institutional divisions within academia. Poverty is an economic issue, a sociological issue, a psychological issue, a political issue, and a philosophical issue. Moreover, poverty is a rhetorical issue. It is rhetorical in the sense that despite the proliferation of "poverty knowledge" during the last thirty years,¹ many questions concerning poverty can never be answered with scientific certainty. While good scientific information is certainly critical to the poverty debate, the public debate over poverty will nonetheless always revolve around difficult philosophical questions and be shrouded by numerous uncertainties.

Poverty is also rhetorical in the sense that beliefs regarding poverty, as well as those concerning its various treatments, are influenced by different value hierarchies and are highly dependent on perceptions and frames based more or less on substantive knowledge. Different ideological perspectives concerning the role of government, the "deserving" and "undeserving" status of the poor, the responsibilities of citizenship, the extent of true opportunity, and the intended and unintended consequences of government action dominate public debate concerning poverty. Assumptions concerning both the responsibility for poverty (whether it is structural, individual, or some combination of the two), and the responsibility for its treatment (public, private, or individual "self-help") are critical to the public support, or lack thereof, of anti-poverty policies. Few areas of consensus arise, leaving a greater role for rhetorical efforts to influence public policy.

The rhetorical nature of poverty increases exponentially when it is considered in the context of particular political situations. Politicians and other policy entrepreneurs must not only negotiate the quagmire of ideological differences and seemingly contradictory findings within the policy literature, but must at the same time appeal to broader audiences who hold different interests as well as different

This dissertation follows the style and format of *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*.

assumptions concerning poverty. As David Zarefsky wrote in his *Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty*:

To view a question of public policy as a problem of rhetoric . . . is to focus on the creation and exchange of symbols through which issues are perceived, defined, addressed, and resolved. In a government based on consent, any policy proposal can be examined from a rhetorical perspective. Ways must be found to persuade relevant audiences to support the proposal. . . . strategies must be imagined and symbols generated to associate the policy proposal with the audience's values and predispositions. What is involved here is neither pandering to the audience nor passively laying a proposal before an audience in the confidence that its merits are self-evident but an active process of mutual adjustment.²

Policy advocacy, in other words, does not occur in a vacuum, and because any poverty program must generally take from the non-poor to provide some sort of benefit to the poor, the support of the non-poor is both inherently more difficult and more important to attain.

During the twentieth century, the American president has clearly a critical figure in the nation's ongoing struggle with poverty. The American welfare state was born at the national level when Franklin Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act in 1935, which included provisions for old age insurance, unemployment compensation, and public assistance to dependent children in need. For almost the next thirty years, the programs begun during the New Deal changed little beyond their gradual expansion. It was not until Lyndon Johnson declared a "War on Poverty" in 1964 that the role of the federal government in the lives of the nation's poor significantly changed again. Toward the end of Johnson's administration, support for the nation's poverty programs began to wane for a variety of reasons, and soon popular focus turned more toward welfare rather than poverty. Following Johnson, both Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter made significant efforts to revolutionize and "control" the growing welfare system, although neither was ultimately successful. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan would come to epitomize the so-called "retrenchment era" in American social policy when he drastically cut funding for social programs through his budget policies and, his critics argue, by contributing to the nation's anti-government and anti-welfare sentiments through his rhetorical efforts.³ Bill Clinton, who campaigned in 1992 on the promise to "end welfare as we know it," eventually signed legislation in 1996 that ended the federal entitlement to public assistance established by Roosevelt, imposed work requirements and time limits, and earned the condemnation of many of the nation's poverty scholars. All five of these presidents—Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton—thus placed poverty or welfare reform high on their domestic agendas, and all five attempted to utilize the power of the rhetorical presidency in their pursuit of their respective goals concerning poverty and welfare.

This project examines how these five presidents discussed issues of poverty and welfare from Johnson's declaration of War on Poverty in 1964 to Clinton's signing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996. The project is guided by two goals, one primarily descriptive and analytical, and the other more prescriptive. The first goal is to provide a rhetorical history of the president's involvement with poverty and welfare issues during this crucial time period for the nation's social programs. While several excellent histories have been written on poverty in twentieth century America,⁴ and a number of rhetorical analyses on specific poverty issues are available,⁵ no single work reviews the poverty rhetoric of these presidents longitudinally. The second goal goes beyond description. I hope to utilize the analysis to advance the understanding of poverty politics, and to uncover possible strategies for enhancing the manner in which the nation assists its poor and honors its ideals.

The analysis is informed by the perspective, influenced by the work of Deborah Stone and Chaim Perelman, that public policy issues in general should be considered with a focus on the inherent tensions and paradoxes involved and the tough choices they present.⁶ In particular, I argue that there are four critical tensions relevant to issues of contemporary poverty politics in the United States: politics vs. policy, deserving vs. undeserving, help vs. hinder, and equality vs. freedom. The key to improving the manner in which the nation confronts the problem of poverty requires understanding and negotiating these tensions.

The analysis shows that the five presidents had a mixed but overall rather poor record in confronting and attempting to balance these tensions. In general they tended either to avoid the tensions altogether, or fall to one or the other extreme. That being said, the analysis also reveals that there is considerable common ground concerning some critical issues between all the presidents, whether they were Democrats or Republicans, ideologically moderate or more partisan. Foremost among these are the beliefs that equal opportunity should be the overarching ideal, work should be rewarded well, and those that cannot help themselves should be supported as generously as possible by the government. The analysis also provides a greater understanding of the particular mix of constraints and opportunities relevant to poverty politics, and thus leads to a set of conclusions of how the public debate concerning poverty can improve. The analysis supports the notion that both conservatives and liberals need to come to certain realizations regarding poverty and welfare.

Perhaps the most important insight derived from the analysis involves President Clinton's signing of the 1996 welfare bill that "ended welfare as we know it," which was heavily criticized by the American Left at the time. Viewed from the perspective of the four primary tensions and in the context of more than thirty years of presidential poverty politics, however, Clinton's signing of the bill lends itself to a much different interpretation. As revealed in Clinton's remarkable address at the signing ceremony, the law has the potential to transform the debate concerning American poverty in a positive manner and in turn improve the situation for many of America's poor. Briefly stated, the law could lead to a significant re-framing of the debate away from the generally unpopular focus on welfare and welfare recipients to the

working poor and the conditions and difficulties under which they labor, which could, then lead to other positive transformations beneficial to the American poor. Said differently, the 1996 law essentially shifted how the help/hinder and deserving/undeserving paradoxes influenced the politics of poverty, significantly reduced the difficulty of negotiating the politics/policy paradox when seeking to help the poor.

In this first chapter, I outline the four critical paradoxes that impact American poverty politics. The description of the tensions also serves as a review of research concerning poverty and welfare issues. Chapters two through six examine each president individually. Each of these chapters begins with background information on the president and his record concerning poverty and welfare issues while in office, followed by a review of their rhetorical efforts that outlines the major themes utilized by each president involving welfare and/or poverty during their administrations. The conclusion of each these chapters analyzes the president's rhetorical themes through the lens of the four primary tensions. Lastly, in chapter seven, I present the overall conclusions of the analysis.

The Paradoxes of Poverty

The paradoxes of poverty represent key issues with two opposing sides that inherently work to complicate the manner in which poverty is discussed and remedies are proposed and evaluated. These paradoxes, alternatively labeled “traps” by R. Kent Weaver, create hard choices for policymakers because they cannot “increase the prospects that they would get more of something they wanted without also increasing the risk that they would get something they did not want in political or policy terms.”⁷ Ideally political actors should recognize and attempt to balance these paradoxes, but, unfortunately, the nature of politics typically does not reward such prudence. As a result, poverty rhetoric is often skewed, focusing upon only one side or the other of these various dilemmas. In a two-party political system, this phenomenon can easily lead to what Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones labeled “noncontradictory argumentation.”⁸ In such situations, each party adopts one side of the paradox and builds an argument that seems exceedingly logical to them and others who share their perspective. That argument, however, seems absurd to others whose logic is based primarily on the opposing side of the paradox. As a result, polarization occurs and understanding between the perspectives becomes exceedingly difficult. This polarization is encouraged by the natural human impulses of egoism and selective interpretation, which leads individuals to seek out opinions that confirm their point of view and dismiss those that challenge it. In a polarized atmosphere, political actors attempting to find the right balance between the perspectives are caught in a crossfire, and find very little support.

One of the more important goals of this analysis, however, is to avoid non-contradictory argumentation, and focus more attention on the need to confront the paradoxes natural to these public

policy issues. My goals are thus clearly distinct from those of the politician. This distinction was captured well by Vincent and Vee Burke, as they explained the failure of Richard Nixon's Family Assistance Plan:

The analyst and the politician are natural antagonists. The analyst insists that when values conflict, society must understand that every choice sacrifices one good for another. . . . But the politician tries to cover up such conflicts; his rhetoric deliberately evades dilemmas and inconsistencies. It is not so much that the politician wants to have his cake and eat it too. Rather, he knows that some voters want to have it and some want to eat it and he wants to please them all.⁹

Uncovering and understanding these paradoxes as an analyst will not be enough, however. I hope to bridge the gap between analyst and policy maker and discover viable political paths to progress. My task therefore, is to function as what Celeste Condit has described as an “empathic” critic, whose role was to “locate pieces of common ground among various voices and to discover options for those compromises necessary for co-existence . . . [and] that maximize multiple values and interests.”¹⁰ The first step in fulfilling this role is to lay out the difficult choices that exist which politicians must then attempt to negotiate.

Paradox #1: Politics versus Policy

This first paradox involves the natural tension that often develops between political and policy goals, and represents a key tension in the essentially any public policy issue. Individually, both political goals and policy goals are admirable and although the two goals are not inherently incompatible, when pursued simultaneously they do tend to clash. Often conceptualized as the “delegate” and “trustee” models of representation, or in the distinctions between campaigning and governing or responsiveness and leadership, the question of whether politicians should follow and honor public opinion or follow their own preferences, beliefs, and “principles” is critical. One can assume that all politicians want to (a) get re-elected and grow in popularity, and (b) improve society by proposing, supporting, and implementing what they believe is “good” policy. The problem is that the pursuit of one is often a detriment to the pursuit of the other, and, of course, politicians differ in their propensity or even intention to hit the mark. Nonetheless, the assumption that both policy and political goals are important remains, and the ultimate goal of perfect balance should serve as a useful target for which to strive.

Policy goals can be considered a function of both ideology and substantive information, both of which have been shown to be quite important to presidential decision-making.¹¹ As used here, ideology involves personal beliefs concerning the particular value hierarchy to which societies should subscribe and the methods to achieve them, whereas substantive information—that may originate in think-tanks, research universities or institutions, or bureaucracies—involves empirical data regarding the available means to

those ends. Ideological beliefs also tend to serve as a filter through which substantive information passes and is potentially distorted or selectively interpreted. Individuals weigh ideology and information to various degrees, and thus the conflict between ideology and information represents a secondary dilemma in which political actors must attempt to find the proper balance (in other words, how much information does it take to change an ideological assumptions?)

In competition with policy goals are *political goals*—primarily linked to popularity and re-election—that require the servicing of numerous constituencies. As Richard Neustadt wrote in his classic work, *Presidential Power*: “A modern President is bound to face demands for aid and service from five more or less distinguishable sources: from Executive officialdom, from Congress, from his partisans, from citizens at large, and from abroad.”¹² To fulfill their political goals, politicians must get re-elected, which means they must service these constituencies and address the needs of relevant audiences. Which audiences are “relevant” depends on the situation at hand: during an election, it may be eligible voters; during a vote in Congress, members of Congress; during the implementation of policy, bureaucrats and citizens; etc. Getting re-elected also typically requires funding, which in turn requires fundraising and brings various contributors, interest groups, and political action committees into the picture. In addition, popular support is a key variable concerning presidential influence over Congress,¹³ thus the pursuit of political goals such as raising approval ratings in the short term may be critical to the pursuit of policy goals in the long term. Overall, the point is that inattention to political goals can not only lead to ineffectiveness in office, but swift removal from office with the next election.

This split between politics and policy, and the need to balance them, is evident in much of the literature on the presidency. Paul Light outlines three presidential goals: reelection, historical achievement, and good policy (the latter two I collapse into policy goals, assuming good policy would translate into historical achievement). Light wrote that “[j]ust as congressmen are motivated by electoral considerations . . . [p]residents concentrate on issues that match their personal and political goals.”¹⁴ Jeffrey Cohen’s work focuses on the difficulty presidents face trying to be both leaders and responsive to the public. He wrote that “[m]odern presidents face not only high but contradictory expectations. The contradiction between providing active policy leadership for the mass public while also being responsive to its policy preferences strikes at the core of the modern presidency The president’s success hinges on his ability to maneuver between the calls for responsiveness and leadership.”¹⁵ Others such as Deborah Stone, Sam Kernell, Daniel Ponder have made similar comments concerning how presidents must negotiate the split between politics and policy.¹⁶ The split is also evident in the design of information networks within the presidency.¹⁷

Although policy goals may seem to be the more noble of the two, policy and political goals both have positive and negative dimensions, depending on perspective. Positively, “politics” can be framed as democratic responsiveness and “policy” as bold, courageous, principled leadership. Negatively, “politics”

is merely pandering and demagoguery, and “policy” is tyranny and imperialism. The extremes—all politics with no concern for policy, or all policy with no concern for politics—are both undesirable and detrimental to a democracy, therefore political actors seek to balance them in some form. Unfortunately, there is a fine line between Aristotle’s prudent statesman (ideal mean), Plato’s totalitarian philosopher-king (policy over politics), and Machiavelli’s amoral prince (politics over policy).

The search for the ideal mean between politics and policy calls forth the concept of prudence. In recent years, prudence has enjoyed a resurgence through the work of Edwin Hargrove, Eugene Garver, Ronald Beiner, and others. Hargrove wrote that prudence was the “trait that Aristotle values in leaders above all. . . . This is the one characteristic that citizens need not have but that rulers must have. Prudence is practical wisdom about how to balance and accommodate competing interests in a constitution.”¹⁸

Applying the notion of prudence directly to American presidents, Hargrove wrote:

presidents must use skills and embrace goals that are congruent with the historical context. The preeminent skill is discernment of the political possibilities at a given time. Of particular importance is insight into the resources for and constraints on action in the political culture. . . . Presidents must be prudent in their discernment of the historical possibilities for action if their idealism is not to become grandiosity. One must be prudent before one can be bold.¹⁹

Eugene Garver summarized the concept simply as the “good practical use of reason,” and it includes the possession of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and ethical virtue (*arete*), as well as the application of political judgment (*praxis*).²⁰

In summary, the policy-politics paradox assumes that politicians cannot simply act on their own policy goals or even on policy information provided to them, but must always “play the game” of politics. Policy preferences must always be justified to a number of relevant audiences, a step that makes rhetoric inherently critical. Rhetoric clearly plays an important role in negotiating this tension, therefore considering how rhetors attempt to reconcile these competing goals is critical to the analysis and subsequent judgment of policy rhetoric. In the end, the tension mirrors what Donald Bryant argued was the function of rhetoric: seeking the ideal mean between adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas.²¹ Too much of the former is the abdication of leadership, whereas too much of the latter can often represent its abuse.

Although the policy-politics paradox is relevant to all policy issues, it is particularly difficult to negotiate concerning issues of poverty for a number of reasons. Put simply, there are significant political penalties to confronting poverty in the United States, and few benefits. Indeed, the inevitable impact of the remaining three paradoxes is to complicate the capacity for policy makers to negotiate this paradox. Additionally, politicians receive little political incentive to confront issues of poverty, in part because the poor have very little political power in the United States. The poor do not vote as often, and they tend not

to donate their time or money to political campaigns. Most policies to help the poor must on some level take from the non-poor to provide to the poor, thus requiring politicians to take benefits away from those who do vote and provide money and time in order to give to those who do not.

Any significant effort to confront poverty will also be expensive. Weaver labeled the high cost of poverty programs the “money trap,” writing that “most meaningful welfare reforms require spending more money than the public thinks is necessary or more than Congress wants to spend.”²² One simple fact that eludes many critics of welfare, for example, is that welfare programs are much cheaper than the alternatives designed to help people off welfare and into the mainstream workforce. Welfare is simply a stipend designed to keep a family fed and sheltered from month to month. A full-fledged anti-poverty program could necessitate funding public service jobs, job training, transportation, child care, neighborhood rehabilitation, housing, and health care in addition to an income stipend, all of which carry significant pricetags.

Other aspects of American political culture exacerbate the difficulty of confronting poverty. As evidenced by the classic works of Alexis DeTocqueville, Robert Bellah, and others, the United States is a highly individualistic society. That individualism works naturally against placing a focus on poverty as a broadly important policy issue in America. The examination of the freedom versus equality paradox will consider in greater detail how American individualism works against confronting poverty. American politics also tend to reward optimism. As Clinton speechwriter Michael Waldman wrote: “The truism in American politics is that the more optimistic president always wins.”²³ Unfortunately, placing poverty high on the policy agenda is typically anything but optimistic. The complexity of the issue in general also increases the difficulty of negotiating the policy versus politics tension. Substantive information concerning poverty is very complicated and often contradictory. Poverty intersects with controversial issues of race relations and gender inequality, which have their own pitfalls that politicians often seek to avoid. The sort of consensus that can arise and make a policy direction clear to all is rare. The complexity of the information also provides easy ammunition to those opposed to policy proposals, to the point that it seems that some sort of evidence can be found for or against any policy position.

For the most part, the policy-politics paradox works against advocates of more generous poverty programs because it tends to work to keep poverty off the agenda and to keep reforms minor. Politicians often have several policy issues that are important to them that they hope to address during their time in office, but only a few issues are on the public agenda at any given time. Without necessarily resorting to “pandering,” it would make sense for politicians to choose to focus on those particular issues within their personal agenda that have a greater degree of public support and potential political benefit.²⁴ Due to its inherent constraints, it would seem likely that politicians would rarely choose poverty as their signature issue.

Interestingly, the dynamics of the policy-politics paradox switch when the dominant frame becomes “welfare,” rather than “poverty.” Whereas the poverty frame would favor avoidance, the welfare frame, at least during the latter part of the twentieth century, favored action, practically any action. Weaver summarized this public push against welfare by writing, “Although the evidence [public opinion] suggests public ambiguity rather than a clear mandate for many items on the welfare reform agenda, it also suggests that public antipathy toward the AFDC program was so great that people would acquiesce to almost any welfare reform proposal enacted by politicians.”²⁵ Here, with personal policy goals and public opinion matching, the attack on welfare actually benefits from a lack of tension in the policy-politics paradox. When public beliefs hold such a negative connotation of welfare and welfare recipients, as documented in Martin Gilens’ aptly titled book, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*,²⁶ politicians are rewarded when they place welfare reform on the agenda, especially when the assumption behind the policy proposals is that benefits would be reduced and harsher requirements are instilled.

Despite the natural disadvantages to advocating more serious confrontation with poverty, there remains a resilient store of beliefs in the United States that supports helping the helpless and punishes politicians that seem heartless or harsh to the poor. This counter-reaction to the American impulse against anti-poverty programs will be evident during the reviews of the equality-freedom and deserving-undeserving paradoxes. These compassionate beliefs follow the philosophy of Adam Smith as explained in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which assumed that human beings have a natural sentiment or sympathy for other humans that can counteract pure self-interest. Politicians therefore cannot simply dismiss the poor and disadvantaged, because by doing so they would be open to criticism, especially if the poor in question are considered “deserving.”

Paradox #2: Equality versus Freedom

In her insightful *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, Deborah Stone explained that the first task of the political analyst was to “reveal and clarify the underlying value disputes so that people can see where they differ and move toward some reconciliation.” Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca’s work also focused values and how they are debated in discourse. They argued that people rarely, if ever, argue that they are *against* positive abstract values such as equality, liberty, or freedom. Considered separately, most values are universally supported. Dilemmas arise primarily when these inherently positive values must compete with each other. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca define these situations as matters concerning the “hierarchy of values.” They write:

Value hierarchies are, no doubt, more important to the structure of an argument than the actual values. Most values are indeed shared by a great number of audiences, and a

particular audience is characterized less by which values it accepts than by the way it grades them. . . . The reason why one feels obliged to order values in a hierarchy, regardless of the result, is that *simultaneous pursuit of these values leads to incompatibilities, [and] obliges one to make choices.*²⁷ (emphasis added)

Combined with Aristotle's theory that virtue corresponds with finding the ideal mean between extremes, a key issue in public policy deliberation can be framed as the quest for finding the right balance between the various competing values relevant to that issue. The second primary paradox thus focuses on the particular value dilemma between the glorified American ideographs of freedom and equality.

In *Political Communication*, Dan Hahn argued that the primary question of American politics is "how much freedom versus how much order?" The question falls easily into Aristotle's construct. The extreme of complete freedom with no order would represent anarchy, whereas an extreme of complete order with no freedom would be tyranny. The question of ideal governance becomes a question of finding the right balance between the two, which inherently leads to the question of the appropriate role of government. This tension between freedom and order greatly influences issues of poverty and welfare in the United States. "Order" in this case is framed as "equality," in the sense that equality is not a natural occurrence in a capitalistic society, therefore some outside authority is typically necessary for equality to be realized. Both freedom and equality are principles that have been highly valued throughout American history. In a political context, "freedom" signifies the absence of undo authority and an individual right to make important choices in life such as whom to vote for and where and how to live and work. In an economic context, freedom is typically framed with a focus on individualism and self-reliance. As Alexis DeTocqueville and Robert Bellah have so clearly documented, individualism is likely the most strongly held value in the United States. From the American Revolution of the late 1700s to the Conservative Revolution of the late 1900s, this individualistic impulse has consistently fed the criticism of government, the glorification of work, and the sanctification of private property.

Based on the proclamation in the Declaration of Independence that it was a "self-evident truth" that all men were created equal, equality has also served a critical role in American mythos. During the 20th century, as chronicled by Celeste Condit and John Louis Lucaites, the ideograph of equality served as the basis of the Civil Rights Movement and moral calls for the United States to live up to its cherished ideals.²⁸ Similar to freedom, equality can be framed both politically and economically. When framed politically, both equality and freedom seemingly work together. Equal political rights serve the notion of political freedom. Hence the various movements that sought to bring change to American society throughout the 20th century could all wrap their arguments within the values of both freedom and equality and essentially call for change in the name of having both realized.

In their respective economic framings, however, freedom and equality can diverge. Whereas the rhetoric of economic freedom has typically focused on individualism and freedom from government, calls

for economic equality often require or demand action from outside authorities to bring about equality. In most cases, that outside authority is government. Government, in other words, can play the dual role of villain and provider, depending on which value is held dominant.

Applied to the issue of poverty, the equality-freedom dilemma essentially defines the primary political positions. If equality serves as the overriding premise, poverty is deemed un-American and anti-poverty efforts are much more defensible. Government intervention is clearly necessary in order to overcome barriers that hold back the disadvantaged. The villains in this narrative are often the rich, who are often portrayed as greedy and hateful of the poor. The poor, on the other hand, are victims of the rich, the racist, and/or the sexist, or, in a more neutral storyline, of the unforgiving economic system. This is the primary narrative in the mindset of the American Left.

Alternatively, if economic freedom and the individualism it supports dominate the primary frame, then anti-poverty efforts rather than poverty are seen as violating cherished American ideals. Not only do government programs represent government paternalism, but the taxes that must be collected to fund such programs are viewed as an infringement of private property rights. From this perspective, poverty is often interpreted as the natural result of lack of effort, talent, or proper behavior, and wealth as the natural result of superior effort, talent, or behavior. The villains are the poor themselves and the government and its supporters (“bleeding heart liberals”) that serve as enablers. This is the narrative that is typical to many on the political right, with social conservatives focusing on pathological behavior and free market conservatives focusing on welfare’s perverse economic incentives.

In the American ethos, the conflict between equality and freedom is often transcended through the notion of “equal opportunity,” an almost universally accepted ideal of the American system. Even controversial conservative scholar Charles Murray has argued that he supports “[b]illions for equal opportunity, not one cent for equal outcome—such is the slogan to inscribe on the banner of whatever cause my proposals constitute.”²⁹ Most political differences are not based on *whether* equal opportunity should be the goal, but rather *the extent* to which equal opportunity exists and the appropriate role of government in closing any gap. In many ways, whatever presumption dominates that issue—the extent of equal opportunity—will dictate the presumption concerning the need for anti-poverty efforts.

The conflict between equality and freedom becomes even more complicated when economic freedom is redefined from the dominant negative frame of “freedom from” to the more progressive positive frame of “freedom to.” This is essentially what Franklin Roosevelt did in order to justify the New Deal philosophically within the American tradition. In his famous speech to the Commonwealth Club during the 1932 presidential campaign, Roosevelt turned the tables on those attacking his ideas as affronts to personal liberty by providing an extensive account of American history that traced the role of government and its necessity to adjust as environmental conditions dictated. Equating the feudal barons of the 18th century to the huge corporations of the 20th, and the constraints to political freedom then with the

constraints to economic freedom now, Roosevelt presented the argument that in the economic environment at the time government must step in to assist the individual in order to restore free enterprise. In doing so, Roosevelt united the normally disparate values of freedom and equality by shifting the focus from political freedom to economic freedom. Interestingly, Roosevelt never really invoked the value of equality. He focused on a rhetoric of economic freedom that served as a surrogate to the rhetoric of equal opportunity. In other words, Roosevelt somewhat paradoxically called for more *government control* as the basis of insuring more *individual freedom*.³⁰ As noted by Robert Eden, these arguments served as the basis of the regime of pragmatic liberalism that would dominate American politics for the rest of the century.³¹

Roosevelt's redefinition of "freedom" clearly worked to balance the two ends of the equality-freedom paradox. In the same speech, Roosevelt employed another rhetorical construct that also served to balance the two values:

The Declaration of Independence discusses the problem of government in terms of a contract. Government is a relation of give and take—a contract, perforce, if we would follow the thinking out of which it grew. Under such a contract rulers were accorded power, and the people consented to that power on consideration that they be accorded certain rights. The task of statesmanship has always been the re-definition of these rights in terms of changing and growing social order. New conditions impose new requirements upon government and those who conduct government.

Roosevelt then built on the metaphor of the "social contract" by enumerating which rights government should enforce. Borrowing from the Declaration of Independence, the first right Roosevelt discussed was the "right to life," which he interpreted as "a right to make a comfortable living" which an individual "may by sloth or crime decline to exercise. . . but it may not be denied him." The argument became a critical element of Roosevelt's philosophy.

The social contract became a device that rhetorically established the respective roles of both government and individuals within a society. Government is called upon to provide true opportunity to its citizens (a "chance"), whereas citizens have the responsibility to take those opportunities seriously and do their part, namely to give sincere effort and not partake in activities that may squander their opportunity. The metaphor of the social contract, therefore, mediated between individualism based on freedom that denied equality and government paternalism based on equality that violated American notions of freedom.

Key to understanding Roosevelt's argument was that during the expansion of the country before the Industrial Revolution, the nation's agrarian base and vast "safety valve" of the Western prairie, the social contract was honored without the need for much governmental interference. "No one who did not shirk the task of earning a living," Roosevelt explained, "was entirely without opportunity to do so." In other words, Roosevelt was arguing that any individual willing to work hard could go west, claim land, and make a decent living. The "right to a make a comfortable living" being naturally supplied, the role of

government was understandably limited. With the Industrial Revolution, however, the situation changed. From this perspective, the New Deal was not constructed as a response to the Great Depression, but rather to the Industrial Revolution, or, more specifically, to the end of Jefferson's dream of a nation of self-sufficient farmers.

At the conclusion of this speech, Roosevelt again addressed the likely criticism that his policies would violate the liberties of some in the name of the liberty of others. Directly confronting the inherent tensions, he explained that "individual liberty and individual happiness mean nothing unless both are ordered in the sense that one man's meat is not another man's poison We know that liberty to do anything which deprives others of those elemental rights is outside the protection of any compact, and that government in this regard is the maintenance of a balance." Roosevelt then closed the speech with the call to "recognize the new terms of the old social contract," a line Clinton would borrow sixty years later.³²

In the speech, Roosevelt was able to construct his new image of progressive government by appealing to traditional conservative icons. The rhetoric of the social contract was essentially a moderate argument that required government to insure the obligation implicit in the myth of the American Dream: if you work hard, you should have a decent standard of living. Roosevelt was thus able to redefine liberalism yet remain consistent by shifting the emphasis from political freedom to economic freedom. The enemy of freedom was thus redefined away from tyrannical government and more toward unregulated business and the dogma of *laissez-faire* economics.

Whereas Roosevelt's abstract notion of the social contract was able to transcend the competing values of equality and freedom and justify an activist role of government that also respected American individualism, in its practical application it remained open to criticism from both sides. Both the government and the individual could be charged with violating the terms of the contract. If the government did not provide equal opportunity to its citizens, then government could be held to blame and an increased government involvement could be justified. However, individuals could also be blamed for failing to live up to their end of the bargain. The existence of poverty, therefore, is not sufficient to assume a lack of equal opportunity. The particular attribution of that poverty—whether environmental or dispositional—becomes a key issue, for the establishment of causal blame inherently dictates treatment responsibility. And in a nation that glorifies individualism as the United States does, the undeserving poor—the poor that are poor due to their own actions or lack thereof—are not seen as warranting assistance. This rhetorical tension between the "deserving" and "undeserving" is the focus on the third primary paradox of American poverty.

Roosevelt's New Deal, and specifically the Social Security Act of 1935, represents the first time the American president has become significantly involved in the issue of poverty. Before then, the issue was primarily handled at a local level. The Great Depression and the extremely high unemployment it brought forced the issue onto the national stage. Roosevelt also provides a strong example of prudential

rhetoric. Whereas the question of whether Roosevelt had hit the ideal mean is certainly open to interpretation, it is clear that in his reframing of freedom and in his rhetorical construction of the social contract, Roosevelt provided future political actors with two means by which to negotiate the freedom-equality dilemma. Rather than simply appeal to one side or the other, Roosevelt offered a position that considered both sides seriously and attempted to balance them properly. Roosevelt, therefore, will serve as a template from which to compare the five presidents that represent the focus of my analysis.

Paradox #3: Deserving versus Undeserving

Much of the traditional American perspective concerning poverty took Elizabethan England as its model. A primary feature of the English poverty ideology was the division of the poor into the deserving (those who were not able to work, such as the disabled, the elderly, or widowed women, or those out of work due to circumstances out of their control, such as seasonal layoffs or injuries) and the undeserving (the rest of the poor). From one extreme, all poor are victims, thus deserving of the help of the non-poor, with no questions asked or expectations levied. At the other extreme, all poor are implicated in their own poverty, thus undeserving of help.

According to Michael Katz, author of *The Undeserving Poor*, the justification of governmental assistance for the deserving poor fits effortlessly within dominant Judeo-Christian ideals, and does not run counter to the American ideal of individualism.³³ The undeserving poor, on the other hand, present a difficulty. Within this paradigm, poverty was normally considered a moral deficiency. Such assumptions have a long history in the United States. Social Darwinists, following the work of Darwin and the ideology of Jeremy Bentham, believed that, although unfortunate, the poor must pay the price demanded by nature and essentially be allowed to die out. Helping the poor was thus interpreted as unnatural and detrimental to the common good. Following the teachings of John Calvin and Martin Luther, the Protestant religious tradition has often also supported the position that “economic success was a sign of favor. Poverty, therefore, was also a sign of God’s will.”³⁴ Sociologist Christopher Jencks explains that the undeserving poor “have always posed a problem for compassionate liberals. When the poor are doing all they can to better themselves, it is easy to argue that they deserve a helping hand. . . . But when sane, healthy adults refuse to follow norms of behavior that most of society endorses, the claim that we should help them arouses intense controversy.”³⁵ In other words, whether the poor are perceived as deserving or undeserving essentially defines responsibility for the cause of poverty, and at the same time assigns responsibility for its treatment. The deserving-undeserving line thus presents policymakers with a dilemma: policies must be symbolically constructed to help the deserving poor but not the undeserving poor, or, conversely, cuts to social programs must be viewed as harmless to the deserving poor while disciplining or punishing only the undeserving. In most cases, of course, the line is far too indefinite to allow such careful negotiation

between the two. For example, in what R. Kent Weaver terms the dual clientele problem, punishing “undeserving” parents will often harm “deserving” children.³⁶

The distinction of whether someone is deserving or undeserving of help is made through a communicative act called an attribution. An attribution is a particular answer to the question “what caused the observed behavior and its consequences?”³⁷ The study of attributions involves the analysis of “the basic processes involved in perceiving the self, other persons, and the setting in which people function,” and concerns “behavior, behavioral consequences, and the circumstances under which behavior occurs,” along with the cognitive connections between these various components.³⁸ In its most basic form, an attribution is an argument concerning the allocation of responsibility for an action or phenomena to particular actors, structures, or both.

Attributions, in other words, are inherently rhetorical in the sense that they are arguments that always deal with somewhat uncertain phenomena. Attributions delve into conscious and subconscious processes and concern questions of causation and influence, topics that have always and most likely will always elude clear validation. Attributions at times masquerade as empirical observations—and indeed attributions can be more or less supported by evidence—but are often nothing more than exercises in mind-reading, or, as Fritz Heider, an early pioneer in attribution research, described it: “naïve psychology.”³⁹ Most often, attributors simply consider whatever manifest data can be perceived, and attempt to postulate (rationally or irrationally) backward in time and inward in motivation, often making numerous mistakes along the way. The issue of poverty is perhaps the most extensively examined issue within attribution research. Millions have been tested, polled, and interviewed concerning how they explain poverty.⁴⁰ In addition, hundreds of books have been written by scholars from a variety of ideological perspectives attempting to explain empirically or rationally the phenomenon of poverty.⁴¹ Within every explanation are explicit or implicit attributions of responsibility.

Manifest poverty is empirical in the sense that a poverty rate can be established, or that a poor person can be perceived (although looks can obviously be deceiving). The critical question, however, is the storyline leading up to the resulting poverty. Here the research in social psychology concerning attributions provides some interesting insights that are particularly relevant to this project. First, the most basic distinction made in the literature is between external and dispositional attributions. External attributions place responsibility or credit outside the individual, whereas dispositional attributions place responsibility or credit on the individual. Labeling the poor as undeserving, therefore, is a dispositional attribution, and labeling them as deserving is an external attribution. Second, research in social-psychology has also revealed the existence of “actor-observer effect,” an inherent trait that leads individuals to attribute positive events dispositionally and negative events environmentally when they happen to them, and vice versa when they happen to other people.⁴²

Applied to American poverty, these egotistical phenomena help explain in part a natural reaction of the non-poor to tend to blame poverty on the poor. Doing so absolves the non-poor of being implicated in having a hand in causing the poverty, and, due to the individualism that dominates the United States, also absolves them of responsibility for the treatment of poverty. In addition, if success in general is attributed dispositionally, the non-poor's success is interpreted as individual effort, not a forgone conclusion. In his classic *Blaming the Victim*, William Ryan succinctly captured some of the dynamics of attributional egoism concerning poverty and racial inequality, writing:

So our potential Victim Blamers are in a dilemma. . . . They cannot bring themselves to attack the system that has been so good to them, but they want so badly to be helpful to the victims of racism and economic injustice. Their solution is a brilliant compromise. They turn their attention to the victim in his post-victimized state. . . . They explain what's wrong with the victim in terms of social experiences *in the past*, experiences that have left wounds, defects, paralysis, and disability. And they take the cure of these wounds and the reduction of these disabilities as the first order of business. . . . This is the solution of the dilemma, the solution of *Blaming the Victim*. And those who buy this solution with a sign of relief are inevitably blinding themselves to the basic causes of the problems being addressed. They are, most critically, rejecting the possibility of blaming, not the victims, but themselves. They are all unconsciously passing judgments on themselves and bringing in a unanimous verdict of Not Guilty.⁴³

All else being equal, therefore, a political argument geared to the non-poor that frees the non-poor from responsibility for poverty will have a persuasive advantage over a political argument that hold the poor blameless, and thus, as a result, creates an expectation that the non-poor must share some responsibility and act. This phenomenon thus increases the difficulty of political actors who hope to advocate policies based on the assumption that poverty is an environmental attribution. The bottom line is that the non-poor want to believe the poor are undeserving.

Another difficulty of the deserving versus undeserving paradox could be labeled the “victimage dilemma.” This dilemma occurs when proponents of poverty programs seek to establish clearly the external attribution of poverty. Although the external attribution, if accepted, should lead to the non-poor being more amendable to policies designed to help the poor, at the same time that attribution also can work to remove any sense of self-efficacy from the poor. An argument that the poor are not to blame for their poverty is also an argument that the poor are not in control of their situation. They must therefore be passive and hope for the non-poor to help them. As a result, arguments that are successful in seeking the support of the non-poor may also work to reduce the perceived efficacy concerning efforts of the poor. Due to this dilemma, stories of individuals that were able to overcome their poverty on their own become curious rhetorical controversies. Such stories provide inductive evidence that the poor can overcome

poverty, thus it supports a dispositional attribution. Advocates of poverty programs, therefore, tend to disapprove of such stories, as they work against the broader argument that poverty is an environmental condition. The relevant question becomes whether these stories are the exceptions to the rule or simply examples of the rule. In the end, an odd situation arises where the poor need to hear such stories and believe in the hopeful logic of the “American Dream,” but the non-poor should not take too much stock in them.

One major limitation of the attribution research, as well as the construct of the deserving-undeserving poor, is its simplistic either-or logic. The question of deserving versus undeserving cannot be considered a simple yes or no question; few cases of poverty would hold that sort of clarity. In most cases, individuals would fall somewhere in between the extremes of deserving and undeserving. The problem, of course, is what happens to those that are “somewhat” deserving? Where does society draw the line? The extreme cases seem easy to define. An individual who was given all opportunity to succeed but through laziness turns to crime and drugs and as a result falls into poverty may not garner much sympathy. The child born into poverty who was never provided an opportunity for a suitable education, on the other hand, typically would garner significant concern. It is the gray areas that are the most important to consider, but, indicative of much contemporary political debate, the gray areas tend not to get the attention.

Proponents of either extreme can garner significant evidence pointing toward the deserving or undeserving status of the poor. Proponents of the deserving poor can point to the low-wage economy, inequality in the education and health care system, racial or gender discrimination, the appalling conditions of the inner-city, among others. Opponents of the undeserving poor, in turn, point toward “pathologies” such as drug use, crime, laziness, and sexual promiscuity that leads to single parent families, among others. The former focus on the lack of opportunity, while the latter focus on the lack of responsibility. The former blame either the system itself or those that benefit disproportionately from the system (“the rich”), while the latter blame the poor. Evidence is inherently inconclusive, however, because statistics can never tell the entire story. A proficient snapshot of the current situation can be provided outlining the degree of racial or gender inequality, educational deficiencies, drug use, crime, or the number of single-parent families, but the story behind the numbers and the actual impact of those numbers on poverty remains rather elusive, at least to anything approaching consensus.

The cyclical nature of many of the pathologies exacerbates the confusion. For example, does drug use lead to poverty, or did pre-existing poverty lead to drug use? As a result, research on poverty typically serves as ammunition for both sides in constructing arguments that are persuasive to those audiences that already support that side, but are generally dismissed by those that hold the opposing perspective. In other words, the research that attempts to shed light on the deserving-undeserving line tends to polarize positions, rather than focus on finding the right balance.

Another important concept that helps explain the distinctions made between the deserving and undeserving poor is the role of sympathy. Sympathy is a critical emotion to those advocating programs that assist the poor, especially if those programs expect some sacrifice from the non-poor. Simply put, if the non-poor have sympathy for the poor, they are more likely to see the poor as deserving rather than undeserving. This assumption is not new. In *The Rhetoric*, Aristotle defined pity as “a certain pain at an apparently destructive or painful evil happening to one who does not deserve it and which a person might expect himself or one of his own to suffer.”⁴⁴ Aristotle also argued that people feel pity for those “like themselves in age, in character, in habits, in rank, in birth; for in all these cases something seems more to apply also to the self; for in general, one should grasp here, too, that people pity things happening to others in so far as they fear for themselves.”⁴⁵ Aristotle thus provided two necessary conditions for sympathy: the target of sympathy must be undeserving of their fate, and the target must have enough in common with the sympathizer that they could imagine suffering the same fate.

Applied to the politics of contemporary American poverty, this notion of “there but for the grace of God go I” is certainly relevant. If the non-poor can see themselves as potentially poor or similar to people that are poor, they are more likely to support programs for the poor. The stereotypical image of poverty held by the non-poor so evident in the literature, therefore, becomes even more critical. The tendency for the poor to be geographically isolated from the non-poor, especially with the increasing concentration of poverty in the inner-city, works to decrease potential development of sympathy, as do racial and gender differences. This stereotypical image, however, is exaggerated. As economist Rebecca Blank wrote in 1997, “In the last decade, we have consistently misunderstood the nature of poverty in America, believing that it is more behavioral, more ghetto-based, and more a problem experienced by people of color. Hence, for many middle-income Americans, the poor have come to seem alien and less ‘like us’ than they actually are.”⁴⁶ This “misunderstanding” is an important one, because it works to decrease the natural sympathy the non-poor have for the poor.

Two examples will help exhibit the importance of sympathy. Of all the various major social programs, social security has traditionally been the most popular. Clearly its popularity is partly due to its universal nature: all contributors are supposed to receive its benefits eventually, not just the poor. But considering polls show that many current contributors never expect to receive the benefit, something more must be at work. Considering the role of sympathy, it is clear that everyone is either currently elderly, has close friends or family that are elderly, or can at least imagine that they may be elderly one day. The elderly also generally have a positive public image. They tend not to be cognitively connected to pathologies, and are not expected to be entirely self-sufficient. The elderly poor therefore tend to be considered deserving of help, and most people can sympathize with them.

The popularity of the New Deal programs during the Great Depression represents another example. At that time, a majority of the population was unemployed and millions were newly poor. The

large numbers made it clear that the poverty should be attributed environmentally, not dispositionally. It was thus easy for the remaining non-poor to imagine being poor, and thus to be sympathetic. Both conditions were again in place: the poor seemed undeserving of their poverty and many of the poor were very similar to the non-poor. As a result, the programs remained popular.

In recent decades, however, the public image of poverty and the corresponding public support for poverty programs has waned significantly. Indeed, the analysis in chapters two through six will show how the support for poverty programs began to decrease during the late 1960s and continued to drop throughout the next thirty years. This increasingly negative view of the poor was a primary characteristic of the conservative perspective concerning poverty that moved from the fringe to the mainstream during this time period.⁴⁷ This conservative viewpoint, which many liberal scholars argue is infused with both racism and sexism,⁴⁸ often focuses on the image of the “welfare recipient” or of the “underclass,” two labels closely tied to the undeserving poor. In 1992, Christopher Jencks argued that instead of simply talking about the “poor,” “we now talk about the underclass, which by common consensus includes only the undeserving poor: men who have no regular job, women who depend on welfare to survive, street criminals, winos, and addicts. . . . The popularity of the term thus signals a political shift: instead of blaming poverty on society, as we did in the late 1960s, we are now more inclined to blame poverty on the poor.”⁴⁹

Research in the field of social psychology provides more evidence for this shift, and has consistently shown that the non-poor generally attribute poverty to individualistic causes.⁵⁰ In a 1996 article, Heather Bullock summarized the research, writing: “Among middle-class persons, perceptions of welfare recipients and the welfare system are overwhelmingly negative. Poor people and welfare recipients are typically characterized as dishonest, dependent, lazy, uninterested in education, and promiscuous.”⁵¹

The construct of the deserving/undeserving line has been generally attacked by scholars on the left, such as Herbert Gans,⁵² but it nonetheless represents a public belief that can be manipulated from both ends of the political spectrum. Indeed, the history of poverty policy throughout the twentieth century can be framed as alternative trends in the line between the deserving and undeserving poor, with the Great Depression and Great Society as twin peaks in defining the poor as deserving of help, and the late 1980s and early 1990s as the height of the period when they were viewed as undeserving.

To illustrate this point further, an important quirk in the polling research must be considered. As demonstrated in Tom Smith’s 1987 article “That Which We Call Welfare by Any Other Name Would Smell Sweeter” public opinion is steadfastly opposed to welfare, but continues to support efforts to help the “poor.” Evidently, the two labels—the poor and the welfare recipient—were completely dissociated in the public mind, with the latter label firmly considered to denote the undeserving poor. Research published in 1995, for example, showed that while 41 percent of respondents had a negative view of “people on

welfare” and 85 percent believed they were “too dependent on government assistance,” only 4 percent had a negative view of “poor people.” In addition, 66 percent believed government spent too much on “welfare,” whereas only 15 percent felt too much was spent on “assistance to the poor.” In their 2004 article entitled, “Hate Welfare but Help the Poor: How the Attributional Content of Stereotypes Explains the Paradox of Reactions to the Destitute in America,” P. J. Henry, Christine Reyna, and Bernard Weiner reviewed the literature and concluded:

Stereotypes of those on welfare portray them as lazy people who are capable of working, but instead choose to engage in morally questionable strategies in order to increase their monthly welfare checks. . . . Through the propagation of these stereotypes via the media and political rhetoric, the image of the welfare recipient has developed into that of a person who epitomizes laziness and yet is reaping the benefits of our social system. This stereotype not only represents a violation of American values, but also reminds Americans that the welfare system has failed. On the other hand, Americans are more sympathetic to poor people, who are stereotypically portrayed as working hard to make ends meet. If poor people work hard, yet still encounter environmental or economic barriers to success, then they are seen as deserving of assistance. Government programs designed to give these individuals an extra economic boost to get ahead are supported because these programs reward hard work and benefit the “deserving.”

Martin Gilens, in his 1999 book aptly entitled *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, lends further support with the argument that while welfare is hated, anti-poverty measures perceived to benefit the deserving poor remain popular. Robert Reich labeled this public disdain for handouts but support for the working poor as the “the moral code at the heart of capitalism.” In sum, the American people were willing to help the poor, especially the working poor, just not welfare recipients, even though they were often one and the same.⁵³

In sum, the paradox for policy makers concerns the need to help the deserving while not helping the undeserving, a difficult balance to hit when no clear distinctions exist. The public image of the poor is thus critical to public support for poverty programs, especially the questions of whether the poor are seen as deserving or undeserving of help, and whether the non-poor can develop identification with and sympathy for the poor. An important focus of this project, therefore, is the image of the poor articulated by these American presidents. For each of the five presidents I will examine what stories the president tell about the poor, what labels they use, and whether they directly or indirectly attribute poverty dispositionally or environmentally.

Paradox #4: Help versus Hinder

The fourth and final paradox focuses on intended and unintended consequences of social programs. The paradox itself revolves around whether poverty programs help or harm the people they serve. At one extreme, all poverty programs are justified because they are designed well and do what they are supposed to do, and thus represent money well-spent. At the other extreme, poverty programs are not justified because they are counterproductive and harm the people they are supposed to help, and thus not only represent wasted public resources, but public resources that cause rather than alleviate public problems. Similar to the other paradoxes, unfortunately, much of the public debate is noncontradictory on this subject, as those on the left focus on how programs help the poor and those on the right focus on how programs harm the poor. Ideally, policy makers would understand that social programs are not inherently at either extreme, and thus would seek to design a program with a clear purpose that would be cognizant of the possibility of counterproductive tendencies. The discussion of this fourth paradox will focus on three issues: the various purposes of anti-poverty programs, the degree to which poverty programs accomplish their intended purposes, and, perhaps most importantly, the role of unintended consequences in the debate over social policy programs.

The first issue within this paradox involves the intended purpose of the anti-poverty programs. This issue is not a major point of discussion within the literature or the political conversation, but is an issue that I found to grow in importance as this project developed. Indeed, I would argue that the issue *should* become more of a concern in the debate. At the most basic level, anti-poverty programs have one of two primary purposes: they either seek to solve the problem of poverty, or to treat its symptoms. These two purposes have important differences, especially in terms of how the program should be evaluated. If the purpose of a program is to “solve” or “end” poverty, then success is defined as the program’s beneficiaries no longer being considered poor, perhaps even becoming self-sufficient. Ultimate success for such a program would lead to the program no longer being necessary. If the purpose of the program is to treat the symptoms of poverty, rather than end it, then success is defined as the program’s beneficiaries being better off with the program than without it. They would, however, still be expected to continue to need the benefits. The benefits must continue or else the beneficiary would fall right back to where they were before.

The reason why this distinction is important is that if a program designed to treat symptoms is judged as a program to solve the problem, it will inevitably fall short. This is precisely what seems to have happened to the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, which was established in the 1934 Social Security Act. The program was designed to alleviate the suffering of women with children who could not provide for themselves. At the time, most of the program’s beneficiaries were widows, and women then were not expected to be able to support themselves, especially “single mothers.” The program

provided a small stipend to these mothers with the purpose of providing them with at least, it was hoped, a bearable standard of living from month to month. The program was not designed, however, to lead mothers to self-sufficiency. It was designed to keep them from starving from one month to another. By focusing on these rather limited goals, the program itself remained rather inexpensive. All the government had to do was send a small monthly check.

As the years went by, the population served by the program changed, as did the work opportunities and social expectations placed on single mothers. A higher and higher percentage of the women were divorced or never married, rather than widowed, thus their poverty was more susceptible to assumptions of a less “deserving” dispositional attribution rather than an environmental one. As more and more women worked, a program that provided for certain women who “chose” not to work became more controversial, especially when other women were now working, paying for day care as well as taxes that helped support the women on welfare. When the AFDC became the primary target of the critics of welfare in the last third of the twentieth century, one of the primary arguments was that the program was failing because it provided a disincentive from work and caused dependency. The program, however, was designed to replace work and it was assumed that the women enrolled would be dependent on the funds provided. The program, in other words, was routinely attacked for doing what it was designed to do. In the words of Rebecca Blank, “To claim that these programs have failed because they haven’t removed people from poverty is to expect something that these programs were never designed to accomplish.”⁵⁴

Part of the complexity of anti-poverty programs is the myriad of programs that can be considered as part of the fight against poverty. Until it was replaced with Temporary Aid to Needy Families in the 1996 bill, AFDC was the main program viewed as “welfare” by the American people. A number of other programs, however, are also relevant, including Food Stamps, low-income housing assistance, Social Security, health programs, job training programs, public works programs, child care and child support programs, tax programs, unemployment insurance, special programs for the disabled, even educational services. Some of these programs are available to the poor and non-poor alike, such as Social Security, and some are “means-tested,” meaning that only those individuals that fall within certain guidelines are eligible. Some of the programs are designed for temporary relief, such as unemployment insurance, while others assume beneficiaries would be served long term. As already mentioned, some programs seek to solve the problem, while others primarily treat the symptoms. The key issue, I would argue, is that the purpose of the program must be clear to those evaluating its performance. With this in mind, the analysis of the five presidents pays particular attention to how the presidents frame the purposes of the various anti-poverty programs when the support or attack them.

The second issue of relevance within the help versus hinder paradox focuses on the degree to which the programs actually fulfill their intended purposes. The evaluation of public policy is a major area of research now in the social sciences, both in the universities and in the growing number of think tanks

around the nation. Interestingly, the focus on welfare programs, at least for the last few decades, has typically been on the unintended consequences of these programs rather than the intended consequences. While the unintended consequences are certainly worthy of examination, the framing of the evaluations in general often give the impression that the programs never do what they are designed to do, which is clearly untrue. Simply put, food stamp programs have helped millions eat a better diet, housing programs have given millions better homes, welfare programs have alleviated some of the symptoms of poverty for millions, Medicaid has improved the health of millions. Whether or not these programs achieved their goals efficiently or not is certainly a difficult—and relevant—question to ask, but the practical absence of any sense that these programs do provide some real benefits to people is rather astonishing.

The third relevant issue within the help versus hinder paradox focuses on the unintended consequences of anti-poverty programs, clearly the most important issue during the current debate over welfare policy. It involves what has become perhaps one of the most important contemporary conservative arguments concerning social policy: the “perversity thesis.” As explained by Albert O. Hirschman, the perversity thesis assumes that any social program will “backfire” due to unintended consequences.⁵⁵ In the case of anti-poverty programs, the primary application of the perversity thesis is that welfare causes more poverty.

Of course, the notion that anti-poverty programs could have unintended effects did not begin with conservative intellectuals writing in the 1980s. Franklin Roosevelt was clearly aware of the hazards of some of the programs we passed during the New Deal. Toward the end of the 1934, Roosevelt seemed to be growing more and more concerned with the expansion in the federal government’s relief efforts, especially direct cash relief. In his 1935 Annual Message, Roosevelt confronted the subject directly:

More than two billions of dollars have also been expended in direct relief to the destitute. Local agencies, of necessity, determined the recipients of this form of relief. With inevitable exceptions, the funds were spent by them with reasonable efficiency, and as a result actual want of food and clothing in the great majority of cases has been overcome. But the stark fact before us is that great numbers still remain unemployed. A large proportion of these unemployed and their dependents have been forced on the relief rolls. The burden on the Federal Government has grown with great rapidity. . . . The lessons of history, confirmed by the evidence immediately before me, show conclusively that continued dependence upon relief induces a spiritual disintegration fundamentally destructive to the national fiber. *To dole our relief in this way is to administer a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit.* It is inimical to the dictates of a sound policy. It is in violation of the traditions of America. Work must be found for able-bodied but destitute workers. The Federal Government must and shall quit this business of relief. (emphasis added)

The final sentence of this excerpt tended to dominate newspapers the next day, and its forcefulness have led some scholars to believe the “Second New Deal” in 1935 was more conservative than the first from 1933-1934.⁵⁶ I tend to disagree with this opinion. I would argue that a leftward shift is evident if the attack on the dole is not considered out of context, as it usually is. Roosevelt’s attack on the dole cannot be understood without the accompanying call to provide decent, respectable work for the able bodied. The intended purpose of the relief program was to provide temporary relief to the unemployed until Roosevelt’s other programs that were designed to improve the economy began to show results. By 1935, Roosevelt realized that the “temporary” relief programs were going to be more than temporary, as the economy had not yet recovered. As a result, more, not less, help was needed.

The Social Security Act, which was introduced to Congress shortly after this speech, created unemployment insurance, social security, and Aid to Dependent Children, which would later be changed to Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Unemployment insurance was designed to provide temporary relief to unemployed workers, and thus soften the blow of the cyclical economy. Social security was designed to provide relief to the elderly, and in part, at the time, to encourage more retirements, thus releasing jobs to younger workers. As mentioned earlier, ADC was designed to provide ongoing relief to single mothers, a category of individuals who at the time were not expected to work. These programs supplemented the massive public works programs that were also a part of the New Deal, which were designed to provide temporary work to the able-bodied until the economy recovered and returned them to the private sector. In sum, Roosevelt was against providing the able-bodied with cash, partly because he believed such a program had the unintended consequences of “destroying the spirit.” However, Roosevelt’s move away from the “narcotic” of the dole was not an attack on the poor, it was rather a realization that the government had to do *more* to help the poor, namely create jobs and make sure the poor had the skills and access to those jobs. This early shift from “welfare to work” represented Roosevelt attempting to shift from a focus on treating the symptoms of poverty to treating the problem, which was a much more significant and expensive job.

Later in the century, the unintended consequences attached to welfare once again became one of the primary points of the debate, especially from those on the right. The most well-known contemporary exposition of the perversity thesis as applied to welfare came from Charles Murray, whose influential work, *Losing Ground*, was published in 1984.⁵⁷ Utilizing statistics and government figures, Murray argued that welfare programs were counterproductive because they rewarded the poor for being idle, primarily because the welfare benefits were higher than the wages they could earn going to work. Murray also argued that those same social programs discouraged marriage and encouraged illegitimate children, because benefits were higher for unmarried women with children. Throughout the 1990s, Murray became a fixture in the editorial pages and congressional hearings, arguing that illegitimacy and dependency were

the key issues in the welfare debate, and that anti-poverty programs were to blame for encouraging both. Murray's work has been heavily criticized from the left, but its impact has nonetheless been substantial.⁵⁸

Other conservative writers added to Murray's thesis. Lawrence Mead's primary point of focus in several books has been how the government's paternalism has resulted in the recipients not being able to learn the importance of work.⁵⁹ Marvin Olasky, who would later become an important advisor to President George W. Bush, wrote in *The Tragedy of American Compassion* that welfare programs have had the unintended effect of reducing the non-poor's attachment to the poor because federal efforts worked to eclipse local efforts and the charity work of private institutions.⁶⁰

The perversity thesis has critical rhetorical importance to the public logic concerning poverty. The argument can actually trump all the other arguments that support anti-poverty arguments. Even if a program negotiates the equality versus freedom paradox and is philosophically justified within American values, and also negotiates the deserving versus undeserving paradox and is seemingly targeted to individuals that merit help, the help versus hinder paradox can still prove untenable. For if a program is assumed to cause more harm than good, any argument for the program can be reframed as an attempt to harm the poor, and doing nothing as more beneficial than doing something. Democratic party advisor James Carville explained the political impact of the perversity thesis as follows:

I've got to hand it to the Republicans. It's simply masterful what they've done so far in this debate. They've managed to convince the American people that they have only two choices on welfare: 1. Spend less money and cure all of society's problems or 2. Spend more money and make the problems worse. . . . thanks to the Republican's fine maneuver, people have a much more respectable option [than seeming greedy]: They can claim it's not greed. It's compassion. Hell, they care too much about people to give them a hand!⁶¹

The perversity thesis thus has the added benefit of providing conservatives with a technical argument that did not actually require an attack on the poor, and thus was not as susceptible to charges of "blaming the victim" or "cold-heartedness."

Another extension of the perversity thesis focuses on the broader economic impact of the programs. The Heritage Foundation, for example, published a booklet entitled *America's Failed \$5.4 Trillion War on Poverty*. A large part of their argument was not only that poverty programs did not work, and not only that the poverty programs caused dependency and rewarded illegitimacy, but that the cost of the poverty programs slowed the American economy in general, thus indirectly causing more unemployment and poverty. The argument was practically a direct opposite of the argument that dominated during the hey-day of the New Deal programs, when the assumptions of Keynesian economics were that the spending spurred by government programs would "prime the pump" and lead to greater

economic growth. This extension solidified the conservative anti-welfare argument, again without having to attack the poor directly.

The response to the perversity thesis has not been very influential. The response has primarily been academic, as various scholars have attempted to dispel what they argue are the misconceptions of the perversity thesis. Several scholars point to the lack of evidence concerning the connection between family decisions and the welfare system.⁶² Others provide research that questions the assumptions concerning welfare and work disincentives. The notion that welfare leads to dependency is attacked with data showing that most stays on welfare are short term. Murray's work in particular has been heavily criticized in a number of publications. Although these scholars provide convincing evidence to counter the logic of the perversity thesis, they have been unable to gain many converts. Indeed, the beauty of the perversity thesis is its simplicity. It makes sense to the non-poor. Both sides of the debate are able to produce data to support their theories, and without any sense of consensus, the simple, and more guilt-free, logic of the perversity thesis will likely continue to dominate. Due to the important implication of a help or hinder perspective, this analysis of presidential rhetoric presented in this project will focus on how the presidents frame the purposes and intended and unintended consequences of the programs they support or criticize.

Conclusion

The four paradoxes of poverty represent difficult issues for any political actor attempting to construct policies geared toward the nation's poor. All four paradoxes can be understood separately, but often work together. The poverty-politics paradox in particular is fueled in part by the other three. It is difficult for political actors to push for policies for the poor due to the degree of misunderstanding and confusion caused by the freedom-equality, deserving-undeserving, and help-hinder paradoxes. The paradoxes especially serve as hurdles to those arguing for increased efforts to help the poor. First, they must justify the policy philosophically within the American value system by negotiating the equality-freedom paradox. Then they must show that the actual recipients are deserving. Then they must demonstrate that the actual policies achieve their goals and avoid unintended consequences. If these three hurdles are all overcome, it must still be politically viable for the political actor to seek the policy. In sum, the "poverty paradox" represents the notion that due to the combination of the American value system, the American political system, and the difficulty of the issue itself, there are significant constraints to any political actor seeking to support policies that help the nation's poor.

The four paradoxes are critical issues for the analysis of presidential rhetoric that will follow. The analysis shows that at times the presidents attempt to transcend them, avoid them altogether, or place blame elsewhere. Avoidance was perhaps the most typical response, as the presidents tended to proceed as if no tradeoffs were necessary. As a result, public debate concerning poverty becomes strained and

disjointed, with both sides accusing the other of causing intentional harm to the disadvantaged, abusing the authority of government, and subverting American ideals. In the end, the quality of the policies actually passed or continued, and in turn the poor themselves, suffer. Unfortunately, a final potential response to the paradoxes—explaining them and confronting them in a realistic manner—is rarely attempted, in large part due to the various political constraints inherent in a two-party system and the prevalence of “non-contradictory argumentation” it tends to sustain. At times, however, the presidents do seem to offer ideas with the potential to negotiate the tensions. The analysis in the following five chapters, therefore, seeks both to evaluate the performance of the presidents through the lens of the four paradoxes, as well as uncover possible promising strategies that could be useful in the future.

Notes

- ¹ Alice O’ Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- ² David Zarefsky, *President Johnson’s War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1986), 5, 6.
- ³ See, for example, Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America’s Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 83.
- ⁴ See Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); Edward D. Berkowitz, *America’s Welfare State: From Roosevelt to Reagan* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1991); and James T. Patterson, *America’s Struggle against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- ⁵ Research from communication scholars focusing on poverty and welfare issues include: Zarefsky, *President Johnson’s War on Poverty*; David H. Zarefsky, “President Johnson’s War on Poverty: A Rhetorical Autopsy,” Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1974; David Zarefsky, “President Johnson’s War on Poverty: The Rhetoric of Three ‘Establishment’ Movements,” *Communication Monographs* 45 (1980): 352-373; David Zarefsky, “The Great Society as a Rhetorical Proposition,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979): 364-378; Robert Asen, “Nixon’s Welfare Reform: Enacting Historical Contradictions of Poverty Discourses,” *Rhetoric & Public Address* 4 (2001), 261-279; David Zarefsky, Carol Miller-Tutzauer, and Frank E. Tutzauer, “Reagan’s Safety Net for the Truly Needy: The Rhetorical Uses of Definition,” *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 113-119; Lisa Gring-Pemble, “Are We Going to Now Govern by Anecdote?: Rhetorical Construction of Welfare Recipient’s in Congressional Hearings, Debates, and Legislation, 1992-1996,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87 (2001), 341-365.
- ⁶ Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002); Chaim Perelman, and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*, trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1969).
- ⁷ R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 44.
- ⁸ Frank R. Baumgartner, and Bryan D. Jones, *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), 107-110.
- ⁹ Vincent J. Burke, and Vee Burke, *Nixon’s Good Deed: Welfare Reform*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 6.

- ¹⁰ Celeste Michelle Condit, "The Critic as Empath: Moving Away from Totalizing Theory," *Western Journal of Communication* 57 (Spring 1993), 189.
- ¹¹ Thomas S. Langston, *Ideologues and Presidents: From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992); Robert C. Wood, *Whatever Possessed the President: Academic Experts and Presidential Policy, 1960-1988* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).
- ¹² Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*, 3d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1990), 7.
- ¹³ George C. Edwards, III., *The Public Presidency: The Pursuit of Popular Support* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983).
- ¹⁴ Paul Light. *The President's Agenda: Domestic Policy Choice from Kennedy to Clinton*, 3d ed. (Baltimore, Md.: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 63.
- ¹⁵ Jeffrey E. Cohen, *Presidential Responsiveness and Public Policy-Making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 1, 8.
- ¹⁶ Sam Kernell, for example, argues that "Strategic presidents balance their ongoing need for popular support against their desire to achieve policy goals important to them and to their party's core constituencies." Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 3d ed. (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1997), 227. Deborah Stone also argued that politicians always have "at least two goals": a policy goal and a political goal. Stone, *Policy Paradox*, 2.
- ¹⁷ Reviewing presidential advisory networks, Karen Hult wrote, "Even if the distinctions between 'policy' and more 'political' decision-making (involving, e.g. electoral strategies and tactics, the results of public opinion polls) will rarely be clear empirically, they do appear to be analytically and normatively useful. That said, however, it should be underscored that political input is desirable—indeed essential—in most policy decisions; a crucial challenge is to better balance the two, not to cast them as mutually exclusive or inevitably in conflict." Karen M. Hult, "Strengthening Presidential Decision-making Capacity," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30 (2000): 27-46. Daniel Ponder wrote that "the optimum strategy is likely one that pursues a mixture of the best elements of both dimensions of politics and policy." Ponder also discusses a similar distinction concerning advice making in the White House. Ponder writes: "a distinction can be made, sometimes clear, other times more ambiguous, between political responsive advice that provides information and perspective on the likely impact of various policy pursuits on the president's political fortunes, and that which puts the focus on the substantive and/or technical aspects of policy concerns. These are distinct, but they need not be considered false dichotomies. The two perspectives are not of necessity antagonistic, and they can be as much complementary as conflictual." Daniel E. Ponder, *Good Advice: Information & Policy Making in the White House* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 8, 175. Policy relevant information typically originates from bureaucratic or academic sources, and concerns past or future problems or policies. Politically relevant information includes "polling" data on various relevant audiences, as well as estimates of congressional support. Both types of information will play an important role in the theory of the rhetorical-institutional presidency. Though many scholars denounce the modern proliferation of polling, its use may be necessary to strike the proper balance between policy and political goals. The distinction between policy and political information leads often to the distinction between political and policy advisors. The Clinton White House presents perhaps the best representative examples, with Dick Morris playing the quintessential political advisor, Robert Reich the policy advisor, and George Stephanopoulos perhaps serving as a form of hybrid. See Dick Morris, *Behind the Oval Office: Getting Reelected Against All Odds* (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999); Robert B. Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); George Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999).

- ¹⁸ Erwin, C. Hargrove, *The President as Leader: Appealing to the Better Angels of our Nature* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1998), 7.
- ¹⁹ Hargrove, *The President as Leader*, vii.
- ²⁰ Eugene Garver, *Aristotle's Rhetoric: The Art of Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 5; Also see Robert Beiner, *Political Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).
- ²¹ Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Function and Scope," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 39 (1953): 401-424.
- ²² Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Knew It*, 51.
- ²³ Michael Waldman, *POTUS Speaks: Finding the Words that Defined the Clinton Presidency* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 131.
- ²⁴ Consider, for example, how Dick Morris explained how he advises politicians to pick which issues to focus upon: "We used polling not to determine what positions he would take but to figure out which of the positions he had already taken were the most popular. I would always draw the distinction between deciding on policy and identifying certain issues for emphasis by telling Clinton, 'You print the menu of the things you want. Then I'll advise which dish to have for dinner tonight.'" Using his analogy, I would argue that poverty is rarely ordered by pollsters, even if the politicians put it on the menu. Dick Morris, *Behind the Oval Office*, 9.
- ²⁵ Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Knew It*, 6
- ²⁶ Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- ²⁷ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 81.
- ²⁸ Celeste Michelle Condit, and John Louis Lucaites, *Crafting Equality: America's Anglo-American Word*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- ²⁹ Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 233.
- ³⁰ Later in the speech, for example, Roosevelt argued that in some cases honoring the social contract may require restricting the freedoms of the "speculator, the manipulator, even the financier. . . not to hamper individualism, but to protect it."
- ³¹ Robert Eden, "On the Origins of the Regime of Pragmatic Liberalism: John Dewey, Adolf A. Berle, and Roosevelt's Commonwealth Club Address of 1932," *Studies in American Political Development* 7 (1993): 74-150.
- ³² During a campaign address in 1991 where he first laid out his political philosophy, Clinton invoked Roosevelt numerous times. Near the beginning of the speech, for example, he said, "More than 200 years ago, our founding fathers outlined our first social compact between government and the people, not just between lords and kings. More than 100 years ago, Abraham Lincoln gave his life to maintain the union that compact created. More than 60 years ago Franklin Roosevelt renewed that promise with a New Deal that offered opportunity in return for hard work." Later in the speech, he specifically invoked the Commonwealth Club address, "Nearly 60 years ago, in a very famous speech to the Commonwealth Club, in the final months of his 1932 campaign, President Franklin Roosevelt outlined a new compact that gave hope to a nation mired in the Great Depression. The role of government, he said, was to promise every American the right to make a living. The people's role was to do their best to make the most of that opportunity. He said, and I quote, "Faith in America demands that we recognize the new terms of the old social contract. In the strength of great hope, we must all shoulder the common load. That's what our hope is today, a new covenant to shoulder the common load." See Clinton, "Remarks by

Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton: Address to Students at Georgetown University,” *Democratic Leadership Council* <www.dlcppi.org/speeches/91newcov.htm> (October 23, 1991).

- ³³ Michael B. Katz, “The Urban ‘Underclass’ as a Metaphor of Social Transformation,” in *The “Underclass” Debate: Views from History*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 7.
- ³⁴ Howard Jacob Karger and David Stoesz, *American Social Welfare Policy: A Pluralist Approach*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1994), 54, 55. See also Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*.
- ³⁵ Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 121.
- ³⁶ R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It*.
- ³⁷ Edward E. Jones, *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior* (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1971), ix.
- ³⁸ Jones, *Attribution*, ix. For useful reviews on attribution research, see John H. Harvey, William John Ickes, Robert F. Kidd, *New Directions in Attribution Research*, Vol. 1. (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1976); John H. Harvey, William John Ickes, Robert F. Kidd, *New Directions in Attribution Research*, Vol. 2. (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1978); John H. Harvey, William John Ickes, Robert F. Kidd, *New Directions in Attribution Research*, Vol. 3. (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1981).
- ³⁹ Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958).
- ⁴⁰ James R. Kluegal, and Eliot R. Smith, *Beliefs About Inequality: Americans’ Views of What Is and What Ought to Be* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986); Barrie G. Stacey, and Ming S. Singer, “The Perception of Poverty and Wealth among Teenagers,” *Journal of Adolescence* 8 (1985): 231-241; Rachel Karniol, “Children’s Causal Scripts and Derogation of the Poor: An Attributional Analysis,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 48 (1985): 791-798; David J. Harper, Graham F. Wagstaff, J. Tim Newton, and Kevin R. Harrison, “Lay Causal Perceptions of Third World Poverty and the Just World Theory,” *Social Behavior and Personality* 18 (1990): 235-238; Constance A. Flanagan and Corinna Jenkins Tucker, “Adolescents’ Explanations for Political Issues: Concordance with their Views of Self and Society,” *Developmental Psychology* 35 (1999): 1198-1209; George Wilson, “Toward a Revised Framework for Examining Beliefs about the Causes of Poverty,” *Sociological Quarterly* 37 (1996): 413-428; Anup K. Singh, “Attribution Research on Poverty: A Review,” *Psychologia* 32 (1989): 143-148; Adrian Furnham, “Why are the Poor Always With Us? Explanation for Poverty in Britain,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* 21 (1982): 311-322; Jon P. Alston, and K. Imogene Dean, “Socioeconomic Factors Associated with Attitudes toward Welfare Recipients and the Causes of Poverty,” *Social Service Review* 46 (1972): 13-22; Heather E. Bullock, “Attributions for Poverty: A Comparison of Middle-Class and Welfare Recipient Attitudes,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 29 (1999): 2059-2082; Heather E. Bullock, “Class Acts: Middle-Class Responses to the Poor,” *The Social Psychology of Interpersonal Discrimination*, ed. Bernice Lott and Diane Maluso, pp. 118-159 (New York: Guilford Press, 1995); Robert J. Pellegrini, Sergio S. Queirolo, Victor E. Monarrez, and Dona M. Valenzuela, “Political Identification and Perceptions of Homelessness: Attributed Causality and Attitudes on Public Policy,” *Psychological Reports* 80 (1997): 1139-1148; Joe R. Feagin, *Subordinating the Poor: Welfare and American Beliefs* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975).
- ⁴¹ Research of American poverty from the Marxist perspective includes Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971); and Piven and Cloward, *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (New York: New Press, 1997); from the feminist perspective: Ruth Sidel, *Keeping Women and Children Last: America’s War on the Poor* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women:*

Social Welfare Policy from Colonial Times to the Present (Boston: South End Press, 1988); and from the liberal economic perspective: John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958); Burton A. Weisbrod, ed., *The Economics of Poverty: An American Paradox* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965); William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987); and Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996). More traditional liberal poverty scholars include Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1981); William Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, 2d rev. ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Joel F. Handler, *Poverty of Welfare Reform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1990); R. Shep Melnick, *Between the Lines: Interpreting Welfare Rights* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1994). Liberal scholars that focus on race include Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, 2 vols., (1944; reprint New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1996); Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (Oxford University Press, 1994); and Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* (Boston: South End Press, 1983). Major works from a social conservative perspective include Lawrence Mead, *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992); and Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1993). From a more economic conservative perspective: Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); and George Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1993).

⁴² Edward E. Jones, and Richard E. Nisbett, "The Actor and the Observer: Divergent Perceptions of the Causes of Behavior," in *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior*, ed. Edward E. Jones, pp. 79-94 (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1971). Perhaps the most obvious example of this phenomenon occurs to those in the teaching profession. Students tend to believe they always earn their good grades through intelligence or hard work, and bad grades are the fault of a difficult or unfair test. For their peers, however, those same students believe that those good grades were due to easy tests, while bad grades were due to those students lack of intelligence or effort.

⁴³ Ryan, *Blaming the Victim*, 29.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press: 1991), 152.

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 154.

⁴⁶ Rebecca M. Blank, *It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage, 1997), 5.

⁴⁷ See Marieke De Goede, "Ideology in the US Welfare Debate: Neo-Liberal Representations of Poverty," *Discourse & Society* 7 (1996): 317-57; William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton*, 2d ed. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998); and Herbert Gans, *The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

⁴⁸ For works that focus on the underlying racism in welfare policy, see Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*; Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare*. For works that focus on the underlying sexism, see Ruth Sidel, *Keeping Women and Children Last*; and Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single*.

⁴⁹ Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 120.

⁵⁰ See George Wilson, "Toward a Revised Framework for Examining Beliefs about the Causes of Poverty," *Sociological Quarterly* 37 (1996): 413-428; and Anup K Singh, "Attribution Research on

Poverty: A Review," *Psychologia* 32 (1989): 143-148; Heather E. Bullock, "Class Acts: Middle-Class Responses to the Poor," in *The Social Psychology of Interpersonal Discrimination*, ed. Bernice Lott and Diane Maluso (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).

⁵¹ Bullock, "Class Acts," 125.

⁵² Herbert Gans, for example, argues that the debate between deserving and undeserving is "irrelevant and undesirable." Gans believes that "The only proper research perspective . . . is to look at the poor as an economically and politically deprived population whose behavior, values—and pathologies—are adaptations to their existential situation." See Gans, "Culture and Class in the Study of Poverty: An Approach to Anti-Poverty Research," in *On Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, ed. Daniel P. Moynihan (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 205. See also Gans, *The War Against the Poor*.

⁵³ Tom Smith, "That Which We Call Welfare by Any Other Name Would Smell Sweeter: An Analysis of the Impact of Question Wording on Response Patterns," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51 (1987): 75-83; R. Kent Weaver, Robert Y. Shapiro, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "The Polls—Trends: Welfare," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 59 (1995): 606-27; P. J. Henry, Christine Reyna, and Bernard Weiner, "Hate Welfare but Help the Poor: How the Attributional Content of Stereotypes Explains the Paradox of Reactions to the Destitute in America," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 34 (2004): 52-53; Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*; Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet*, 320-21. Also see James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith, *Beliefs About Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986); and Robert Y. Shapiro and J.T. Young, "Public Opinion and the Welfare State: The United States in Comparative Perspective," *Political Science Quarterly* 104 (1989), 59-87.

⁵⁴ Blank, *It Takes a Nation*, 7

⁵⁵ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, and Jeopardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991).

⁵⁶ Arthur Schlesinger, for example, argues that the Second New Deal, which backed off of broad government planning represented a conservative trend, and was caused by FDR's growing reliance on the more conservative members of his "Brain Trust" such as Leon Henderson, Thomas Corcoran, and Benjamin Cohen. See Schlesinger, *The Politics of Upheaval* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1960).

⁵⁷ Murray, *Losing Ground*.

⁵⁸ For critiques of Murray's work, see Sara S. McLanahan, "Losing Ground: A Critique." *IRP Special Report* 38 (1985); "Are We Losing Ground?" *Focus* 8 (1985): 1-12; and Theodore Marmor, Jerry Mashaw, and Philip Harvey, *America's Misunderstood Welfare State: Persistent Myths, Enduring Realities* (New York: BasicBooks, 1990), 104-14.

⁵⁹ Lawrence Mead, *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992); Lawrence Mead, *Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

⁶⁰ Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1993).

⁶¹ Carville, *We're Right, They're Not: A Handbook for Spirited Progressives* (New York: Random House, 1996), 20-21.

⁶² See reviews in Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty and the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Blank, *It Takes a Nation*; Robert Moffit, "Incentive Effects of U.S. Welfare System: A Review," *Journal of Economic Literature* 30 (1992), 1-62.

CHAPTER II

LYNDON JOHNSON AND THE WAR ON POVERTY

No American president discussed poverty to the extent and with more conviction than Lyndon Baines Johnson. Lyndon Johnson ascended to the presidency with the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. Starting in 1964 and continuing into 1965, Johnson led “one of the most remarkable outpourings of major legislation in the history of the country.”¹ Johnson not only enjoyed large Democratic majorities in the House and Senate, but he was also supported by the American people who were, in David Zarefsky’s words, “[a]roused by President Kennedy’s untimely death,” and thus “long[ing] for redemption through sacrifice.”² In his first State of the Union address, Johnson declared “unconditional war on poverty in America,” and with that declaration, the issue of “poverty” rose from a position of relative obscurity to the top of the nation’s agenda. Indeed, until 1964, the word “poverty” did not appear as a heading in the index of the *Congressional Record* or the *Public Papers of the President*.³

Johnson’s Record

Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 (EOA) on August 20th. It was the primary piece of legislation of his War on Poverty, and included ten programs, including the Job Corps, work-training programs, community action programs, and VISTA, a domestic peace corps. Two weeks later, Johnson signed the Food Stamp Act, which had begun as a Kennedy administrative order, and was now funded for \$375 million over three years. After a landslide victory in the 1964 election gave the Democrats their largest margin in Congress since 1937, Johnson continued to push progressive legislation. He signed his first major “Great Society” measure, the Appalachian Regional Development Act, on March 9, 1965. In April, he signed a major Elementary-Secondary Education bill that authorized additional federal funds for public and private schools and he extended and expanded federal manpower programs for three years. On July 30, 1965, he signed the Medicare bill, which ended a 20 year fight begun by Harry Truman. The following month, he signed a \$7.8 billion Omnibus Housing bill that provided major increases in rent supplements for low-income families. Finally, in October, amendments to the EOA were signed that doubled the first-year authorizations, thus increasing the funding to \$1.785 billion.⁴

The year of 1966 brought forth the Child Nutrition Act, additional Manpower Development and Training Act Amendments, Demonstration Cities legislation, and an increase and expansion to the minimum wage. The momentum of the War on Poverty began to slow, however, while the amendments signed in 1966 continued the funding for the programs, but more and more restrictions began to be added. As explained in the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, “With the public increasingly concerned with

inflation and the Vietnam War, Congressional Republicans found new Democratic allies in the effort to curb the 'Great Society' – not only its spending programs but almost any measure providing social reform. Despite strong persuasion efforts by the president, numerous priority bills became casualties.⁵ The president suffered outright defeats on Civil Rights, the repeal of right to work laws, and unemployment compensation. According to David Zarefsky, the president himself became increasingly preoccupied with Vietnam by 1966 and had begun to “lose interest” in his anti-poverty programs.⁶ During the mid-term elections, the Republicans, utilizing the catchphrase of “guns or butter” and exploiting Johnson’s “credibility gap,” gained 46 seats in the House, 3 in the Senate, and 8 governorships.

1967 was a year of qualified victories for Johnson, and was seen as “clearly the least productive” of his five years.⁷ He passed the largest school aid bill in history in January, but the three other major pieces of Great Society legislation were passed only with major compromises by the administration. The Social Security Amendments increased benefits by 13%, rather than Johnson’s request of 15%. His Model Cities program was funded for a “level far below the amount” Johnson had asked. Finally, the amendments to the EOA decreased funding, although they did provide funding for two years, rather than one, and, for now, Republican attempts to spin off the specific programs into other executive departments were turned back. It was clear that frustration over Vietnam, the urban riots, and the rising government spending in the face of a sluggish economy was taking its toll on Johnson and his popularity.

In 1968, Johnson’s problems continued to mount, as inflation and crime continued to rise, the conflict in Vietnam worsened, and the disorders in the nation’s ghettos and campuses continued to escalate. Johnson did manage to pass a Housing and Urban Development bill that was considered a major victory, and provided new and rehabilitated housing for low and moderate income families.⁸ On March 2, the Kerner Commission released its report on the rioting, implicating white discrimination and detailing the extreme poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and poor education in the inner city. Johnson, however, did not ever directly respond to the findings of the commission, much less promote its recommendations. On March 31, Johnson surprised the nation when he announced he would not seek reelection. After a national campaign in which the Republicans “fiercely attacked the OEO,” Republican Richard Nixon won the presidential election in November.⁹

Although Johnson was unable to add much to his Great Society in his last few years, he did manage to institutionalize the programs he had passed in 1964 and 1965 to some extent. His programs in health, education, and housing continued to be funded and expanded long after his presidency. Many of the EOA programs continued past 1968, although not necessarily under the Office of Economic Opportunity.¹⁰ Scholarly interpretations of the War on Poverty are rather varied. Conservatives use the War on Poverty as the prime example of the failure of “big government” and wasteful spending. Liberals defend the war by pointing to some of the clear successes of Johnson’s programs, such as the significant decrease in poverty among the elderly and the increase in access to health care due to Medicare and

Medicaid. Liberals also focus on the lack of funding for all of the various programs, especially considering the programs eventually only reached six percent of those in poverty at the time.¹¹ Many of the primary programs attached to the War on Poverty, such as the community action programs and job training programs, did not seem to have a significant effect on poverty. Many Americans did escape poverty during the Johnson years, but that can partly be attributed to the economy, which in turn was partly due to the spending on the war.

Johnson's Justification for His Anti-Poverty Program

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Johnson's rhetoric, especially in comparison to the rhetoric of the four other presidents examined in this project, is the variety and intensity of his rhetorical appeals focused on justifying his War on Poverty specifically and the responsibility of the government in addressing poverty in general. As biographers have argued,¹² Johnson was sincere about his goal of providing more opportunity to the nation's poor, and that sincerity was evidenced by an array of arguments that have rarely been heard from the president since then. The major appeals of Johnson's rhetorical justification for the War on Poverty included a philosophical argument that justified his activist approach to government, a self-interest appeal based on the logic of the free market assisted by the government, and a strong "hypocrisy" appeal that attacked the existence of poverty in an abundant land.

The most important of the arguments was the philosophical backing Johnson provided for his vision of society. Similar to Roosevelt, Johnson worked to provide strong abstract reasoning for the program that served to negotiate the equality-freedom paradox by calling on the realization of equal opportunity and economic rights, in part through the call for full employment but balanced with a certain economic conservatism.

On January 1, 1964, in a statement concerning the Report of the Task Force on Manpower Utilization, Johnson offered the vision of society he held that supported the War on Poverty he would introduce a week later during his State of the Union address. Johnson explained that he wished "to see an America in which no young person, whatever the circumstances, shall reach the age of twenty-one without the health, education, and skills that will give him an opportunity to be an effective citizen and a self-supporting individual. This opportunity is too often denied to those who grow up in a background of poverty."¹³ In the statement, Johnson had both established an ideal as well as revealing reality falling short of that ideal, thus justifying action.

During his State of the Union on January 8th, Johnson lamented that "many Americans live on the outskirts of hope" and set "our task" to be to "help replace their despair with opportunity" by declaring "unconditional war on poverty in America." Throughout 1964, Johnson continued to repeat the philosophy of his administration. In March, he explained that "[a] fundamental objective of this Nation is to assure all

Americans full and fair opportunity to develop and apply their maximum productive and earning potential.”¹⁴ During a special address to Congress proposing the War on Poverty, Johnson once again established the gap between the real and the ideal, saying:

we have never lost sight of our goal: an America in which every citizen shares all the opportunities of his society, in which every man has a chance to advance his welfare to the limit of his capacities. We have come a long way toward this goal. We still have a long way to go. The distance which remains is the measure of the great unfinished work of our society. To finish that work I have called for a national war on poverty. Our objective: total victory.¹⁵

In April he promised not to relax his efforts until “every man who wants a job and who is willing to work has the chance to get a decent job.”¹⁶ In a commencement address in May, Johnson applied the Great Society label to his vision, telling the students of Ohio University: “And with your courage and with your compassion and your desire, we will build the Great Society. It is a Society where no child will go unfed, and no youngster will go unschooled. Where no man who wants work will fail to find it.”¹⁷

Within Johnson’s rhetoric, the role of government was very clear: it existed to increase the quality of life of its citizens, especially the disadvantaged, and especially in terms of providing jobs to those able and willing to work. Johnson’s Great Society was, in Johnson’s words, “the grandest design of all—a design which creates a state whose only reason for existence is the welfare and the happiness of its people.”¹⁸ In his 1967 State of the Union, Johnson hoped to be remembered as a president who “tried to improve the quality of life of every American—not just the rich, not just the poor, but every man, woman, and child in this great Nation of ours.”¹⁹ Later, he labeled “the welfare of the American people” the “central business of our governments,” explained that he was using the federal system of government to “improve the quality of American life,” and expressed that the “primary purpose of government to expand the opportunities for all citizens to share in our economic and social progress.”²⁰

During his Howard University Address in 1965, Johnson upped the ante somewhat on the philosophical basis for his programs, tied especially to the government’s role in helping African-Americans overcome the legacy of slavery and discrimination. The speech was reminiscent of Roosevelt’s Commonwealth Club address, where Roosevelt called for the provision of equal opportunity in the name of helping American citizens realize the true meaning of freedom. Here, Johnson actually transcends freedom, and sets his sights on true opportunity. After praising the passage of the Voting Rights Act, and labeling that as the beginning, rather than the end, of needed reform, Johnson continued, saying:

That beginning is freedom; and the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society—to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school. It is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others. But freedom is not

enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, "you are free to compete with all the others," and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. Thus it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates. This is the next and the more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity. We seek not just legal equity but human ability, not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.²¹

Johnson's redefinition of equal opportunity in this speech would later be cited as the true birthplace of the logic behind affirmative action.²²

Despite Johnson's call for "equality as a result" in the Howard University speech, in general the basis of Johnson's programs had many conservative tendencies. First, there was no mention of the need for redistribution of wealth or even any clear sense of obligation in the part of the non-poor. Within Johnson's rhetoric, his goals were to be reached by job training programs, increased education, and the reduction of discrimination. The only thing Johnson seemed to ask of the non-poor was to continue paying their taxes as usual. The economy was rolling along so well during the advent of the Economic Opportunity Act programs that additional taxes were not necessary to fund them at first. It was not until the "guns and butter" days of the late 1960s that the cost of the programs became an issue.

Secondly, Johnson made sure to praise the benefits of the free market system, at one point even thanking God for the "enduring vitality of the American competitive system, the American free enterprise economy."²³ Whenever he praised free enterprise, however, he tended to also include a position for government as well to "assist" and "work together."²⁴ For Johnson, government had the obligation to "make the economy a better servant of human purpose,"²⁵ and as evidenced by the existence of poverty, the prosperity brought about more naturally by the strong economy simply was not enough. The clearest explication of this assumption was presented in a remarkable address when Johnson accepted an honorary degree to the University of Rhode Island in 1966, when he focused on the notion of economic rights:

We decided long ago that our economic system should not be controlled by government decree. We chose freedom in the marketplace, just compensation for all, and for all a chance to share in the country's wealth. And if that share can be obtained through the free markets, so much the better. But where it is denied to some because of the wretched circumstances of their birth, or the poverty of their education, or the foul environment that surrounds them, the sickness that weakens and the despair that crushes them, we believe that the Nation should act. We believe that just as a man has the right to choose those who shall govern the state, so does he have the right to live in a decent

environment, so does he have the right to acquire the skills that useful work requires, and so does he have the right to secure and to hold a job despite the color of his skin, or the region of his birth, or the religion of his father.²⁶

Johnson's War on Poverty, like Roosevelt's New Deal, was not premised on changing or criticizing the economic system, but on making the necessary tweaks in order to have the prosperity reach a broader audience. Those tweaks, for the most part, involved changing the poor themselves by providing them with education, training, and hope.

Johnson even expanded the connection between the War on Poverty and the economic system by presenting an argument on several occasions that justified his programs based on how they would improve the economy and thus lead to greater prosperity for all. During the 1964 State of the Union when the War on Poverty was first introduced, while warning the American people of the difficulty of the task, Johnson also appealed to their self-interest: "It will not be a short or easy struggle, no single weapon or strategy will suffice, but we shall not rest until that war is won. The richest Nation on earth can afford to win it. We cannot afford to lose it. One thousand dollars invested in salvaging an unemployable youth today can return \$40,000 or more in his lifetime."²⁷ Speaking of the benefits of Headstart in particular, Johnson professed that "The bread that is cast upon these waters will surely return many thousandfold."²⁸ "Success in breaking the cycle of poverty," Johnson later argued, would "yield returns in increased tax revenues, lower social welfare costs, and better education, housing, and health care for future generations of Americans."²⁹ He promised that "[e]very dollar spent will result in savings to the country and especially to the local taxpayers in the cost of crime, welfare, of health, and of police protection."³⁰ He told an audience of Democratic fundraisers that "we must eliminate poverty. We want this out of compassion for the oppressed and the awareness that the entire economy will rise as more people share in the benefits of our society."³¹ He vowed that his programs would make "taxpayers" out of "taxeaters."³² The existence of poverty was thus framed as economic inefficiency and the waste of valuable resources, and the programs designed to lift the poor were simply designed to tap into these latent resources. For example, in a letter to Congress, Johnson argued that

a growing Nation cannot afford to waste its human and natural resources—too often neglected and unused in distressed areas. Nor can we afford to shut out large numbers of our fellow citizens from the fulfillment of hope which is shared by the rest of us. The millions of people living in those areas and regions of our Nation which have not shared fully in our general prosperity are in urgent need of help.³³

Full employment was thus not only the realization of an American ideal and the assistance of the disadvantaged, but also represented an economy running at maximum efficiency. Two of Johnson's primary goals—helping the disadvantaged and economic growth—were thus welded together cyclically. Helping the disadvantaged helps everyone. Johnson thus went beyond Kennedy's notion that "a rising tide

lifts all boats.” Johnson was essentially arguing that by helping to lift boats seemingly anchored to the ocean floor, the tide itself will rise higher for all other boats.

Of all the various appeals to justify the War on Poverty, the one that Johnson turned to most often was a “hypocrisy” appeal. Simply put, Johnson attacked the notion that the richest country in the world could accept that poverty within its borders. The appeal appeared from the beginning to the end of Johnson’s time in office, and took several forms. At times, Johnson simply referred to the United States wealth, describing the nation as “the richest and . . . most powerful nation on earth,” the “richest and most powerful country which ever occupied the globe,” “at the height of our prosperity,” “a land that is bursting with abundance,” “affluent America,” “the richest nation ever known to man,” “the richest, the mightiest, the most productive nation in the world,” or “the richest nation the world has ever known.”³⁴ That argument was often tied to the shame of the existence of poverty in such a nation. A couple weeks after announcing the War on Poverty, for example, in his annual economic report to Congress, Johnson wrote:

Americans today enjoy the highest standard of living in the history of mankind. But for nearly a fifth of our fellow citizens, this is a hollow achievement. They often live without hope, below minimum standards of decency. . . . We cannot and need not wait for the gradual growth of the economy to lift this forgotten fifth of our Nation above the poverty line. We know what must be done, and this Nation of abundance can surely afford to do it.³⁵

Elsewhere, Johnson explained how in “a nation as rich and productive as ours we cannot tolerate a situation in which millions of Americans do not have the education, health, and job opportunities for a decent and respected place as productive citizens.”³⁶ In later speeches, he attacked the existence of “poverty in the midst of the land of plenty” and explained how many “are surprised and a little ashamed that our rich country has so many sloughs of despondency.”³⁷ He labeled poverty as simply “inexcusable in the richest land on earth.”³⁸

In his inaugural address in 1965, he again returned to the argument, complete with a religious reference:

In a land of great wealth, families must not live in hopeless poverty. In a land rich in harvest, children just must not go hungry. In a land of healing miracles, neighbors must not suffer and die untended. In a great land of learning and scholars, young people must be taught to read and write. . . . Under this covenant of justice, liberty, and union we have become a nation—prosperous, great, and mighty. And we have kept our freedom. But we have no promise from God that our greatness will endure. We have been allowed by Him to seek greatness with the sweat of our hands and the strength of our spirit. . . . In each generation, with toil and tears, we have had to earn our heritage again. If we fail

now then we will have forgotten in abundance what we learned in hardship: that democracy rests on faith, that freedom asks more than it gives, and the judgment of God is harshest on those who are most favored.³⁹

The final sentence of that excerpt represents another key aspect of the hypocrisy argument: the notion that with the nation's wealth comes an added responsibility. Johnson often talked about applying "the power of America's new abundance to the task of building a better life for every Americans," the need to "turn our wealth and our power to a larger purpose," how "our wealth imposes a solemn responsibility on every citizen," or, put it rather simply, "Having the power, we have the duty."⁴⁰

The sense of sacrifice and responsibility evident in the arguments above was tempered somewhat by the final aspect of the hypocrisy argument, which focused on how because of its wealth, the nation could "afford" meetings its responsibilities. This argument was especially prevalent later in his time in office, when Congress began to pare back his programs. In February of 1968, for example, Johnson seemed to chide Congress for its frugality:

This Nation can afford to meet its responsibilities to the poor among us. Poverty is declining, but even today I am ashamed to say that one American out of every seven is still poor among us. In the wealth of our abundance there is enough to continue our attack, I think, on poverty and the evils that attend it: poor housing, inadequate education and training, ill health and personal frustration and despair, and still defend our freedoms and protect and preserve our liberties. We have the wealth. The question is, do we have the wisdom and do we have the will and do we have the determination to apply strength to remedy weakness, to give up a part of what we have as an investment in the future that I think will pay good returns?⁴¹

In a few instances, Johnson would even add a note of the historical uniqueness of the opportunity to confront poverty. Johnson argued, for example, that the United States was the "first large nation in the history of the world wealthy enough to end poverty within its borders."⁴² Such arguments tended to temper his robust call to action with the feeling that such action would be rather painless considering the wealth the nation enjoyed.

In summary, Johnson had an elaborate array of arguments that served to justify government action against poverty. The prominence of these arguments are especially notable when compared to the four remaining presidents examined in this project. Johnson trumpeted the classic American ideal of equal opportunity, exposed the gap between reality and that ideal, and explicitly challenged the morality of poverty in an affluent nation as well as the financial benefit of its termination. After Johnson's administration, these arguments rarely would be heard from the American president, although arguably the logic behind them would not seem to have been significantly altered.

Johnson's Framing of Poverty and the Poor

Throughout Johnson's time in office, he presented a consistent, though complicated, picture of poverty and those that suffer from it. First, using a variety of appeals, Johnson's description of poverty clearly established an environmental attribution for poverty. Second, Johnson relied on the metaphor of the "cycle" of poverty to depict its complicated nature and to reframe the hopelessness from which many of the poor suffered. Third, Johnson attempted to make race a secondary issue to poverty. Fourth, Johnson presented a four-pronged categorization of the poor, with each group having different characteristics and requiring different programs to assist them. Lastly, Johnson told a number of stories about the poor that attempted to paint a sympathetic picture of the poor and increase the identification and understanding of the poor by the non-poor.

Poverty Is External

From the beginning and continuing throughout his administration, Johnson's perspective on poverty was clear: the poor were innocent victims. In speech after speech, Johnson made subtle or not-so-subtle references that presented an unmistakable environmental attribution to poverty. Alluding to Franklin Roosevelt's famous words, Johnson explained that the poor were "ill-clad, ill-fed, ill-housed" and that for too many "the door of self-improvement and opportunity is closed."⁴³ At times, he confronted assumptions that poverty was deserved, as he did in North Carolina in May of 1964 during his "poverty tour" of several Appalachian states:

In the past 2 weeks I have visited nine States in the Appalachian area. I have seen two kinds of people: those who have a chance to earn a decent living, and those who don't. There are a lot of people in this country who deserve a better chance. There are more than 30 million Americans who live below the poverty line. They deserve a better break. There is a difference between being poor and being in poverty—a big difference. Many of us grew up poor. I was born the son of a tenant farmer in a family of seven. But while we were poor, we were not the prisoners of poverty; we were not caught in the backlash of an industrial revolution as the people of Appalachia are today. We had a chance to break out and to move up, a chance many Americans don't have tonight. Right here in North Carolina, the State where I stand, poverty has left its mark. Some people say that if these Americans are poor, it is their own fault. I have even heard others say that God ordains poverty for the poor. Well, I don't believe them, and I don't believe God believes them either. I believe the reason most poor people are poor is that they never got a decent break. I believe the reason most people are poor is they never had a fair chance

when they were young, and they never got it later on. Some people never got that break because they were born in the wrong part of the country. Some people never got that break because they were born with the wrong color of skin. Some people never got it because they went into farming and they couldn't get enough land to make a decent living when farm prices were too low and operating costs were too high.⁴⁴

Within this paragraph, Johnson presented a number of his typical arguments. He attacked the idea that poverty is a sign of God's judgment.⁴⁵ His dissociation between "being poor" and "being in poverty" was clearly a vehicle to solidify the external attribution of the latter by divorcing it from the gray area of the former. "Being poor" here translates into the lack of income, whereas "being in poverty," as Johnson's other speeches attest, involved a number of factors that go far beyond the simple lack of income. He presented poverty as a result of "not having a fair chance," or, in other words, as the violation of equal opportunity. This violation of equal opportunity was attributed to a variety of factors, including the industrial revolution, geography, discrimination, and economic constraints, all of which would generally be considered external.

During a 1967 message to Congress on poverty, Johnson quoted the words of poverty scholar Jacob Riis:

The slum is as old as civilization. Civilization implies a race to get ahead. In a race there are usually some who for one cause or another cannot keep up, or are thrust out from among their fellows. They fall behind, and when they have been left far in the rear they lose hope and ambition, and give up. Thenceforward, if left to their own resources, they are the victims, not the masters, of their environment; and it is a bad master The bad environment becomes the heredity of the next generation.⁴⁶

The "slum" or "ghetto" became a central issue in the external attribution of poverty. Typically, the slum was described as a "prison" or even a "breeding ground" for hopelessness and crime.⁴⁷ It represented a place caught in a "web of circumstances" that "blocked progress."⁴⁸ By attributing the root of poverty to a geographic area, Johnson was literally providing an environmental attribution. This focus on place would also translate clearly to support Johnson's community programs, although they would also work against Johnson when many of these slums erupted in violence during the summers of the later 1960s. Those riots clearly hurt Johnson's attributional assumption, as much of the public tended to attribute the riots dispositionally. The Kerner Commission report on the riots directly attributed the riots to external forces and suggested drastic measures to counteract those causes, but, rather oddly, Johnson essentially ignored their findings.⁴⁹

One of the more controversial arguments Johnson relied on while attempting to establish his attribution for poverty was when he attributed crime environmentally, which he did on several occasions. During a special message to Congress on crime in 1966, Johnson explained that while the "vast majority

of our citizens who suffer poverty and discrimination do not turn to crime . . . where legitimate opportunities are closed, illegitimate opportunities are seized.”⁵⁰ At a conference later that summer, Johnson made his opinion on crime clear:

But for the long-range prospects of this Nation, I look not to the anticrime laws but instead to the antipoverty laws. Crime is elusive. Criminologists rack their brains to put their finger on the potential criminal and to find out and to determine why, oh why, does he act the way he does. I believe a large part of the answer—possibly, conceivably, the largest part of all—was given to us many years ago by George Bernard Shaw when he said, "The greatest of evils and the worst of crimes is poverty." Poverty. There is the real enemy. Strike poverty down tonight and much of the crime will fall down with it. Punish the criminal? By all means. But if we wish to rid our Nation of crime, if we wish to stop hacking at its branches, we must cut its roots and we must drain its swampy breeding places—and that swampy breeding place, you know where it is—it is in the slums of this Nation. There are very few affluent and educated Americans that are attracted to crime, and very few that have criminal records. But as we bring a fairer measure of prosperity and education to our 32 million poor people in this country, I believe that the crime rate whose growth frightens us tonight will begin to shrink significantly.⁵¹

Johnson sent a message on “Crime in America” to Congress in February of 1967 where he again attacked the “conditions that breed crime.”⁵² Rising crime would become a critical issue in Nixon’s “law and order” campaign during the election of 1968, but Johnson nonetheless continued to focus on the environmental causes of poverty late in his tenure. In March of 1968, Johnson explained to a group of Southern Baptist leaders how crime can be prevented:

crime and violence and despair arise from one cause—from a cause of ignorance and poverty and joblessness. And I think there is very good evidence to that effect. They suggest that the cure for joblessness is a job. They suggest that the cure for ignorance is some training and some education. They suggest that the cure for bad rat-infested slum housing is better housing. And the ultimate cure for crime is to give every citizen a sense of pride and a chance to participate in the development of his community—a sense of his stake in law and order.⁵³

In the years after his presidency, the environmental attribution of crime would become a key characteristic in the conservative attack on the liberal perspective, and the perception of “being soft on crime” would work against Democratic candidates into the 1990s, until crime rates began to fall significantly and the issue finally descended from the agenda.⁵⁴

The Cycle of Poverty

The second primary theme within Johnson's construction of poverty revolved around the use of the "cycle of poverty" metaphor. The cycle of poverty was first mentioned in Johnson's annual economic report to Congress in January of 1964. There he described the cycle of "inadequate schools, drop-outs, poor health, unemployment-creating delinquency, slums, crime, disease, and broken families—thereby breeding more poverty."⁵⁵ Later, in 1967, he provided a similar list of "enemies" of the War on Poverty: "lack of jobs, bad housing, poor schools, lack of skills, discrimination—and each aspect of poverty relates to, and intensifies, the others. That is the vicious circle that you must break."⁵⁶ Johnson seemed to use the "cycle of poverty" argument to emphasize three key issues about poverty: poverty was a complicated issue that would not be conquered easily, poverty bred poverty to subsequent generations, and poverty led to hopelessness. All three of these issues worked to supplement Johnson's overall environmental attribution of poverty.

Johnson's description of poverty as an exceedingly complicated issue worked not only to justify the vast array of programs Johnson was supporting, but also served somewhat as a caution toward high expectations. During his address at the University of Rhode Island, for example, Johnson admitted that "the vicious cycle of poverty persists" and no "single act of government, or a single program or combination of programs, could break that chain overnight" because the "causes and the conditions of poverty are too deep, too various, too subtle, and too firmly interlocked for simple remedies."⁵⁷ Later, he flatly explained, "Poverty defies simple description. It is a cycle which begins with an infancy of deprivation, continues in a youth of hopelessness, extends to a jobless adulthood, and finally ends—for those who survive—in a bleak and despairing old age. At every stage, the conditions of life are poor housing, inadequate education and training, deficient health care, and often, gnawing hunger."⁵⁸

Johnson alluded to the inter-generational aspect of the poverty cycle often. During his poverty tour of Appalachia, for example, he quoted Franklin Roosevelt's words, saying, "It is not the pinch of suffering, the agony of uncertainty that the adults are now feeling that counts the most—it is the heritage our children must anticipate."⁵⁹ He later lamented that "the vicious cycle of poverty persists, hobbling the human personality from generation to generation."⁶⁰ In his final budget message before leaving office, Johnson brought these arguments together, writing:

22 million Americans still living under conditions of poverty do not enjoy the comforts and abundance most of us take for granted. There is no single cause of poverty, nor is there a single cure. Lack of education, inadequate or outmoded skills, poor health, racial injustice, substandard housing—these are the conditions on which poverty feeds. Without a concerted national effort, these conditions are passed along from one generation to the next, in a vicious cycle of hopelessness and dependency.⁶¹

The significance of the inter-generational argument was never clearly outlined by Johnson. Considered through the lens of equal opportunity and the deserving-undeserving line, it would seem clear that a child born in poverty would represent an obvious violation of equal opportunity and the epitome of the deserving poor. The argument also worked against those who preferred procrastination or reliance on eventual economic growth, considering the assumption that poverty not only affects the poor but the following generation as well.

The final aspect of the cycle argument concerns the hopelessness that results from poverty, and its corresponding effect. It was expressed most clearly during Johnson's notable "To Fulfill these Rights" speech at Howard University. Although in this particular case Johnson was speaking specifically of African-Americans, the argument was applied elsewhere to poverty in general. During that Howard University address, Johnson discussed the damage done by poverty:

Men are shaped by their world. When it is a world of decay, ringed by an invisible wall, when escape is arduous and uncertain, and the saving pressures of a more hopeful society are unknown, it can cripple the youth and it can desolate the men. There is also the burden that a dark skin can add to the search for a productive place in our society. Unemployment strikes most swiftly and broadly at the Negro, and this burden erodes hope. Blighted hope breeds despair. Despair brings indifferences to the learning which offers a way out. And despair, coupled with indifferences, is often the source of destructive rebellion against the fabric of society.⁶²

The propensity of poverty to cause the "loss of hope and ambition," as Jacob Riis put it in the passage Johnson had quoted in 1967, presents a difficult gray area for the deserving-undeserving line. If poverty causes hopelessness, and then that hopelessness causes certain behaviors—whether crime, alcohol or drug abuse, or simply allowing the discouragement to affect one's education or job search negatively—the line between dispositional and environmental attributions become unclear. To an outside observer, especially those influenced by the typical egoistic tendencies of human nature, the behaviors serve as manifest evidence of an undeserving nature, regardless of any latent phenomenon of "hopelessness." Hopelessness is also a key link in the cycle of poverty chain, because even if opportunities become available and constraints are removed—perhaps through government programs—the continued existence of hopelessness may make such opportunities futile. For Johnson, hopelessness was clearly considered an environmental attribution.

The cycle theory is essentially a form of the "culture of poverty" thesis, which was originally introduced by Marxist scholar Oscar Lewis, as a phenomenon that defined poverty as a cultural issue rather than an economic one.⁶³ For Lewis, similar to Johnson, the culture of poverty defined poverty as an environmental issue—poverty was transmitted inter-generationally—and thus justified outside help. But

the paradoxical nature of the culture of poverty thesis worked to support the opposite argument as well. As explained by poverty historian James Patterson:

But writers like Harrington and Lewis did not always qualify the culture of poverty argument. Some, including Harrington, used the term carelessly to promote active public measures against poverty. Others, such as the conservative *Saturday Evening Post*, employed it to confirm crude and unflattering stereotypes about the poor and to excuse a policy of neglect. The considerable attention given the notion—in scholarly debates, by the Council of Economic Advisers, by editorialists—suggested that many people wanted to believe the worst of the very poor. Like the metaphor of contagion as applied to the urban slums of 1900, the stereotype enabled more fortunate Americans to relieve themselves of guilt and anxiety.”⁶⁴

Johnson’s reliance on the cycle theory of poverty was a key point in David Zarefsky’s analysis of Johnson’s War on Poverty. Zarefsky argued that through the cycle theory Johnson “identified the enemy so as to assimilate the social into the individualist theory, offering a unified perspective.” Thus it inherently combined dispositional and environmental attributions. Zarefsky added that the use of the cycle of poverty led to the War on Poverty being primarily aimed at changing individuals—providing education, skill, access to jobs, etc.—and thus was “fundamentally conservative, consistent with Social Darwinism.”⁶⁵ In the end, similar to the history of the culture of poverty thesis, the cycle of poverty worked both for and against Johnson. On one hand it helped establish the complexity of poverty and thus justify the broad variety of programs. Due to the cycle, action anywhere on the cycle would theoretically positively influence the remainder of the cycle. Unfortunately, the same logic also worked in reverse. As the results from Johnson’s programs fell short of expectations, the complexity and interconnectiveness of the cycle of poverty began to work against any one specific program, because any effort at any single point on the cycle seemed meaningless overall because of the negative influence of all the other points.⁶⁶

Poverty in Black and White

The third key aspect of Johnson’s framing of poverty involved his attempt to avoid constructing poverty as a racial issue, while at the same time making it clear that African Americans suffered disproportionately from poverty due to the additional constraints that affected them in particular. Zarefsky argued that in 1964 “every effort was made to portray economic deprivation and race as two distinct fates”⁶⁷ The most obvious rhetorical tactic Johnson used in his attempt to put a white face on poverty was his “poverty tour” of nine Appalachian states during May of 1964. Johnson did not, however, completely dissociate the two issues—poverty and race—as he typically referenced race and discrimination along with the other causal factors of poverty in many of his speeches. During that Appalachian tour, for

example, Johnson explained poverty by referencing geography, skin color, and farm prices,⁶⁸ In 1966, lamenting the fact that 32 million Americans remained in poverty, Johnson explained that “America's abundance leaves behind too many who are aged, who are stranded in declining rural areas, who are in broken families, who are uneducated or handicapped or victims of discrimination.”⁶⁹ In both of these examples, race is framed as simply one of many of the external root causes of poverty.

Johnson also attempted to dispel the public misconception that poverty was primarily a racial issue, usually through the use of statistics. During a conference in 1967, for example, Johnson explained that though the people “sometimes may think of it is a Negro affliction. . . seven in ten poor people are white.” In his 1968 economic report to Congress, Johnson made a similar appeal, explaining that while many of the poor are Negro, “two-thirds are white.”⁷⁰ Public miscalculation of the degree to which poverty is dominated by minorities continued throughout the rest of the 20th century.⁷¹

In other speeches, Johnson focused on the special condition of Negro poverty, which shared all the difficult features of poverty in general, but with additional difficulties. Having “dark skin” becomes an added “burden” to those in poverty.⁷² Johnson made this argument explicit during his Howard University Address in 1965:

the harsh fact of the matter is that in the battle for true equality too many—far too many—are losing ground every day. We are not completely sure why this is. We know the causes are complex and subtle. But we do know the two broad basic reasons. And we do know that we have to act. First, Negroes are trapped—as many whites are trapped—in inherited, gate-less poverty. They lack training and skills. They are shut in, in slums, without decent medical care. Private and public poverty combine to cripple their capacities. . . . But there is a second cause—much more difficult to explain, more deeply grounded, more desperate in its force. It is the devastating heritage of long years of slavery; and a century of oppression, hatred, and injustice. *For Negro poverty is not white poverty.* Many of its causes and many of its cures are the same. But there are differences—deep, corrosive, obstinate differences—radiating painful roots into the community, and into the family, and the nature of the individual. These differences are not racial differences. They are solely and simply the consequence of ancient brutality, past injustice, and present prejudice. They are anguishing to observe. For the Negro they are a constant reminder of oppression. For the white they are a constant reminder of guilt. But they must be faced and they must be dealt with and they must be overcome, if we are ever to reach the time when the only difference between Negroes and whites is the color of their skin. [emphasis added]⁷³

Thus Johnson first focused on the similarities between black and white poverty with his typical environmental attribution, and then introduced the additional influences that are specific to black poverty.

By the time the urban ghettos exploded in violence during the later 1960s, Johnson's programs had fallen under the perception that they were primarily geared toward black America. Zarefsky explained a variety of reasons for that perception, including the simple logic that black poverty was much more concentrated than white poverty, thus it became an easier target for the anti-poverty warriors to address with their limited resources. In the end, "the focus on the ghetto, like the foci on youths and job training, proved to be harmful—not only because it failed to conquer the enemy but also because it alienated whites whose support for the war was crucial."⁷⁴

Categorizing the Poor

The final key aspect of Johnson's framing of poverty was the manner in which he categorized the poor and their situations. In general, four categories were relevant: the unemployables, the "frictionally" unemployed, the hard-core unemployed, and the working poor. For each of these categories, Johnson painted a different picture and suggested a different type of government intervention. Consistent with his poverty rhetoric in general, all four groups of the poor were considered deserving within Johnson's eyes. In Johnson's 1967 economic report to Congress, he gave a summary of how each group stood at the time. He counted six and a half million families who "were poor because the heads of their households were unable to work: either aged, severely handicapped, or a widowed or deserted mother with young children." Another three million workers were unemployed, two thirds of which were "frictionally" unemployed. For Johnson, this included "new entrants to the labor force in the process of locating a job; persons who quit one job to seek another; workers in the 'off' months of seasonal industries; those temporarily laid off but with instructions to return." Their unemployment was considered temporary and generally normal, and for the most part they were assumed to have the skills to find labor. The other million unemployed were the "hard-core" unemployed, who lacked the necessary skills to find other than intermittent work." The hard-core unemployed were the "victims of past or present discrimination; those unable or unwilling to move from depressed areas and occupations; the physically or emotionally handicapped." Up to another million of these hard-core unemployed were without jobs but not officially unemployed because they had "long ago abandoned any search for a job. Some had never tried." Finally, two million "breadwinners" worked year-round, but were earning incomes considered insufficient to support "a minimum standard of decent subsistence."⁷⁵

Johnson's four-pronged categorization was rather sophisticated. It clearly went beyond the simple dissociation between the deserving and undeserving poor, even though it actually did not include the undeserving poor at all. Roosevelt had primarily relied on a two-pronged distinction of the poor, including only the unemployables and everyone else. The New Deal was based on this simple distinction, and was designed to provide the unemployables with an income to counteract some of the symptoms of poverty,

whereas everyone else was expected to work. To Roosevelt, to provide the “dole” to the able poor, regardless of the reason for the poverty, was detrimental to their spirit. This belief was not necessarily punitive or unfair to the poor, considering many of the able poor preferred some sort of work rather than a handout, and it typically would cost the government much more to create jobs rather than simply provide an income. Of course, the major difference during the New Deal was that single mothers, then primarily widowers, were considered unemployable and deserving of help, an assumption that would slowly change throughout the 20th century.

Johnson supported the notion that unemployables must be a public responsibility. A month into his tenure in the White House he promised a “compassionate program” to help those “who cannot take full part in the competitive race—the aged, the handicapped, the mentally retarded, the illiterates, the dropouts, the unemployed and their dependent children, the uneducated.”⁷⁶ At an event commemorating the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Social Security Act Johnson proclaimed the “assurance of a level of income for every citizen of this Nation who is too young or too old to work, or has become physically or mentally disabled, or who is unable to find work that is sufficient to assure health and decency” as a “national goal.”⁷⁷ He maintained the assumption until the end, arguing in his economic message to Congress in January, 1969, that “[n]o matter how well we succeed in other efforts, cash assistance will be needed by many of the poor—the elderly, the disabled, and some mothers with sole responsibility for the care of young children.” In that message, he clearly admitted that such programs “do not directly remove the causes of poverty,” but rather simply “sustain life and hope and help prevent poverty from being bequeathed from one generation to the next.”⁷⁸ The idea that people unable to work should be supported by others is not a controversial one—the analysis in the following chapters will show that all five presidents examined here agreed on the issue—the question, on the other hand, is who is deemed as “unable to work.” The most controversial figure, of course, would become the single mother, whom Johnson still typically listed along with the disabled and the elderly.

The frictionally unemployed, Johnson’s second group, was not as critical. Unemployment insurance was already in place to help these individuals, they were assumed to have relevant skills, and most of the frictionally employed were in that position temporarily anyway.⁷⁹

The “hard-core” unemployed, on the other hand, presented a different situation and represented the focus of Johnson’s War on Poverty. The hard-core unemployed were the primary issue in Johnson’s special address to Congress with the interesting title of “To Earn a Living: The Right of Every American”:

The question for our day is this: in an economy capable of sustaining high employment, how can we assure every American, who is willing to work, the right to earn a living? We have always paid lip service to that right. But there are many Americans for whom the right has never been real: —The boy who becomes a man without developing the ability to earn a living. —The citizen who is barred from a job because of other men's

prejudices. —The worker who loses his job to a machine, and is told he is too old for anything else. —The boy or girl from the slums whose summers are empty because there is nothing to do. —The man and the woman blocked from productive employment by barriers rooted in poverty: lack of health, lack of education, lack of training, lack of motivation. Their idleness is a tragic waste both of the human spirit and of the economic resources of a great Nation. . . . Our past efforts, vital as they are, have not yet effectively reached the hard-core unemployed. These hard-core are America's forgotten men and women. Many of them have not worked for a long time. Some have never worked at all. Some have held only odd jobs. Many have been so discouraged by life that they have lost their sense of purpose. In the Depression days of the 1930's, jobless men lined the streets of our cities seeking work. But today, the jobless are often hard to find. They are the invisible poor of our Nation.⁸⁰

All the arguments Johnson discussed concerning the environmental attribution of poverty tended to work with his perspective on the hard-core unemployed. Economic growth would not be enough to bring them out of poverty. They needed not only jobs, but education, training, and for many of the worst off, hope. Essentially, Johnson's goal was to terminate the category of "hard-core unemployed." He realized that unemployables and the temporarily unemployed will always exist, but the hard-core unemployed were not intrinsic to the economy, and thus seemed to defy American ideals. In his words, he hoped to "to reduce unemployment to the point where all that remains is the result of inevitable movements within the work force, irreducible seasonal factors, and a small number of people whose disadvantages or circumstances preclude their satisfactory employment."⁸¹

Johnson's fourth category, the working poor, did not receive much attention rhetorically. Johnson did manage to increase minimum wage from \$1.25 to \$1.60 in 1966, and he extended it to a broader range of workers. At a news conference explaining the bill, Johnson provided several examples of the people who would benefit from the program, one of the few times Johnson provided stories of the working poor rather than the hard-core unemployed.⁸² Although Johnson admitted in his economic messages to Congress that millions of the working poor did not earn wages sufficient enough to bring them out of poverty,⁸³ his rhetoric and his programs typically focused much more on the hard-core unemployed.

Johnson's Storytelling

The final aspect of Johnson's rhetorical construction of poverty and the poor focuses on the stories Johnson told about the poor. Johnson explained the importance with his storytelling in 1964 after being asked why he was getting people "riled up" to enlist the War on Poverty. He answered:

Well, I don't know how I can get them riled up. I hope by picture, and letting them look at conditions that exist in their own communities, with their neighbors; I hope by public speeches outlining what we have seen, and what the conditions are that exist; I hope by messages and by legislation; I hope by leadership . . . that the people can be concerned with the problem and then do something about it. I believe there has been more consideration given to poverty and to conditions of the 10 million families that are in that group during the last 30 days than has been given almost during the entire 30 years. The more we think about it the more we talk about it, and the more we plan about it the more will likely result.⁸⁴

The stories Johnson told served as inductive evidence of his broader assumptions concerning the environmental attribution of poverty, and likely served the intent of building sympathy for the poor and reducing misconceptions about them. Perhaps the most obvious misconception Johnson attempted to dispel was the notion that the poor were lazy and simply wanted an easy life supplied by others. He explained that the “people of America are not asking for handouts. They want a chance to support themselves. They want a fair chance to get ahead.”⁸⁵ Many of the stories asked the audience to imagine being in the place of the poor. At an address at a Steelworkers Union Hall in 1964, for example, Johnson said:

Just put yourself in the position of the man who gets up in the morning and walks the street all day looking for a job that can't be found, and he goes home and talks to his wife that night. You put yourself in that position and apply the Golden Rule and do unto others as you would have them do unto you and we will clear up a lot of these problems that are requiring a long debate in the Congress.⁸⁶

His “poverty tour” to Appalachia provided Johnson with a number of stories including one in which a hungry child was forced to take turns with her siblings on what day they would be allowed to eat.⁸⁷ Johnson also attempted to bring his own humble upbringing into the storytelling, identifying himself directly with the poor that struggled with poverty and unemployment, and were forced to do menial jobs.⁸⁸ He also compared a tenant farmer in North Carolina to his own father’s work as he grew up in Texas working the “halves” picking cotton.⁸⁹ His stories depicted the poor as hard-working, and focused on the similar values of the poor despite their dissimilar environment.

Johnson also used stories to work against the notion that poverty was something that happened to people far away from the non-poor. At a speech in New York, for example, Johnson told the gathered audience that

poverty stalks not only in the hills and the valleys of Appalachia. It is here today. It is here in this city on all sides of the track right around where you live. It is the widow around the corner barely surviving on a pension of \$70 a month. It is the teenager down

the block unprepared by schooling and unwanted by an employer. It is the retired factory worker, sick of body and tired of soul, depending on charity for his medical needs.”⁹⁰

Johnson used stories to build more understanding between the poor and non-poor. In a speech at the Conference on Women in the War on Poverty, Johnson compared the lives of the poor and the non-poor as they wake in the morning, attempt to see doctors, and deal with legal problems.⁹¹

Many scholars of poverty have focused on the gap that exists between public assumptions and the reality of poverty, in terms of who is poor, why they are poor, and where they live. In the face of such public misconception, the rhetorical power of the presidency only increases. Whereas Johnson did reveal his knowledge of these gaps in some of his speeches,⁹² he tended not to focus on this information in major speeches such as his State of the Union addresses or any nationally televised addresses.

In summary, throughout his time in office, Johnson remained consistent in his external attribution of poverty and his positive framing of the poor. He constructed a rather sophisticated picture of the different types of poor, and realized that different poor necessitate different treatments. Johnson’s rhetoric, and his War on Poverty itself, focused primarily on the “hard-core” poor, which were the most controversial and least popular of the four groups he discussed, as well as the most difficult to aid. Johnson also relied on the use of narrative to build more identification between the poor and the non-poor.

President Johnson’s Rhetorical Construction of His Anti-Poverty Programs

There are three relevant issues concerning how Johnson presented the “weapons” of the War on Poverty. The first was his reliance on the metaphor of war and its implications. The second was the manner in which Johnson dissociated the programs of the War on Poverty from the “dole.” And the third is how Johnson explained the positive effects his programs were having.

The Metaphor of War

When Johnson announced his intentions concerning a massive government effort against poverty during his State of the Union address on January 8, 1964, he chose to rely on the metaphor of a “war” on poverty. The metaphor was diverse enough to allow Johnson to frame poverty as the “enemy,” feature various programs as the “weapons,” employed on various “fronts,” while calling on the American people as a whole to “enlist” as his “army.” Zarefsky discussed how the metaphor worked to legitimize the central command of the federal government, de-emphasize comprehensive planning and stress quick, massive action, and thus help Johnson overcome the inherent burden of proof against change.⁹³ By defining the enemy as poverty, rather than the rich, the opposing party, or the economic system, Johnson was also able to bring the American people together, rather than divide them. As Kenneth Burke has argued, one of the

most effective strategies for building identification is to define a common enemy. Johnson hoped the metaphor would work not only to unify, but motivate the American people to action, a strategy that seemed particularly appropriate at the time, considering the nation had been “[a]roused by President Kennedy’s untimely death,” and was thus longing for “redemption through sacrifice”⁹⁴

The war metaphor seemed to work well at first in terms of mobilizing the nation and giving the programs a strong label and a sense of moral purpose. Once the perception that the war was not meeting expectations began to grow, however, the metaphor began to work against Johnson. Like in any war without a clear objective, the American people grew weary. Once the Vietnam War escalated, and brought with it its own controversies, the metaphor had run its course and likely lost its impact. Johnson would periodically mention the War on Poverty in 1967, but rarely in conjunction with its related terms, and it was completely absent in 1968 in relation to poverty.

Anti-Dole

Throughout 1964 and 1965, while proposing and later defending the Economic Opportunity Act and its various programs, Johnson made a significant effort to dissociate between his programs and the “dole.” Similar to Franklin Roosevelt, Johnson realized that the dole was a label that held a universally negative connotation with the American public. It tended to exude an image of the lazy, undeserving poor living off the efforts of others. Johnson realized from the beginning that he needed to avoid that perception for his programs. Johnson began his dissociation at the ceremony at which he signed the Economic Opportunity Act:

This is not in any sense a cynical proposal to exploit the poor with a promise of a handout or a dole. We know—we learned long ago—that answer is no answer. The measure before me this morning for signature offers the answer that its title implies—the answer of opportunity. For the purpose of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 is to offer opportunity, not an opiate. For the million young men and women who are out of school and who are out of work, this program will permit us to take them off the streets, put them into work training programs, to prepare them for productive lives, not wasted lives. We are not content to accept the endless growth of relief rolls or welfare rolls. We want to offer the forgotten fifth of our people opportunity and not doles. Our American answer to poverty is not to make the poor more secure in their poverty but to reach down and to help them lift themselves out of the ruts of poverty and move with the large majority along the high road of hope and prosperity. The days of the dole in our country are numbered. I firmly believe that as of this moment a new day of opportunity is dawning and a new era of progress is opening for us all.⁹⁵

The dissociation is unmistakable. The dole represents a handout, exploitation, an opiate, endless growth in relief rolls, and a waste. Johnson's programs represent opportunity, productivity, hope, prosperity, and progress.

Johnson would go on in other speeches to explain that the War on Poverty is "not a program of giveaway" or a "program of doles" but a "program that is concerned with skills and opportunities, with giving the tools for the job of growth, in making taxpayers out of taxeaters. We are investing in opportunity and giving them the skills to seize it."⁹⁶ The War on Poverty was thus an investment, something worthwhile both to the recipient and the provider, rather than a "waste," which is useless to both. Later in the year, Johnson would again emphasize that his program would help the poor "not through charity or handouts," but would "help people lift themselves from the ranks of the poor."⁹⁷ Johnson further explained that the War on Poverty "rejects the approach that America has outgrown. It rejects handouts, it rejects the dole. It rejects complacency. It rejects growing relief rolls."⁹⁸ In 1965, upon signing a bill providing services to Appalachia, Johnson flatly proclaimed, "The dole is dead."⁹⁹

After placing such negative focus on "the dole" in 1964 and 1965 while establishing the War on Poverty, Johnson actually increased his attack on the "traditional" welfare programs in 1967 and 1968 as he fought for the continued funding of his programs. In his 1967 economic message to Congress, Johnson introduced a series of arguments which would later become the heart of the conservative attack on welfare:

Our system of public assistance is now 30 years old and has obvious faults. The standards of need set by many States are unrealistically low; benefits are further restricted by excessively stringent eligibility conditions. In some respects the system perpetuates dependency.....With minor exceptions, payments under public assistance are reduced dollar for dollar of earnings by the recipient, removing any incentive to accept part-time work. We should encourage self-help, not penalize it. It is time to put an end to this 100 percent tax on the earnings of those on public assistance.¹⁰⁰

Johnson's framing of welfare placed the blame on the system, not the individuals. He depicted the recipients of welfare as trying to help themselves, only to be punished for it with a "100 percent tax." What started in 1967 as a brief mention that "in some respects" welfare perpetuated dependency would later become the primary issue of welfare reform thirty years later. Johnson signed legislation that required states to "disregard" the first \$30 a month earned by recipients of welfare in 1967, and created the Work Incentives Program (WIN) that required states to register recipients for training or employment programs. However, the program was poorly monitored and had little impact.¹⁰¹

In January of 1968, Johnson would call for a special commission to study welfare, explaining that the "outmoded" welfare system "pleases no one." Johnson explain that the program was "criticized by liberals and conservatives, by the poor and the wealthy, by social workers and politicians, by whites and by Negroes in every area of the Nation."¹⁰² The irony of Johnson's anti-welfare rhetoric was that the

welfare rolls actually increased exponentially during his years in office. Poverty did decrease, especially elderly poverty, but much of that was due to the strong economy and increases in social security rates, not necessarily Johnson's innovative programs in community action or job training.¹⁰³ Welfare rolls, however, shot up sharply. The increase did not necessarily represent an increased number of individuals suffering from poverty, but rather a greater percentage of the poor who were actually enrolled. AFDC rolls expanded from 3 million in 1960 to 4.3 million in 1965, and then to 10.2 million by 1971. Participation rates rose from 33 percent in the early 1960s to 90 percent in 1971.¹⁰⁴

Zarefsky explained that the increase was easy to explain in retrospect. As the War on Poverty's community action programs took root, one of their first actions was typically to secure already recognized rights for the poor, among which included welfare benefits. These programs would both advertise the availability of benefits, and walk potential recipients through the process.¹⁰⁵ Considering the overall assumption of environmental attribution for poverty, especially among blacks at the time, it is likely that the typical social stigma working against receiving the "dole" was lessened. Welfare was an "entitlement" since its establishment in 1935, but it was not until the 1960s that it really came to be seen as a right society owed the poor. The 1960s also saw the rise of organizations, such as the Welfare Rights Association, that helped the poor secure benefits.¹⁰⁶

Despite his earlier promises about ending the dole along with poverty, Johnson avoided the issue of the rising welfare rolls. As the opposition grew against welfare, Johnson never addressed any possible connection between his programs and the increases. In retrospect, Johnson's reticence likely helped concede the power of framing to his conservative opponents. In the end, Johnson ironically added to the public animosity of the so-called "dole" with his rhetoric, while millions were being added to the dole, at least in part due to his programs.

Limited Successes

The final aspect of Johnson's rhetoric concerning his programs focuses on how he framed their consequences. It is particularly important in the overall context of this project because this sort of rhetoric was rather rare during the thirty-year period. Johnson actually discussed the results of his programs and attempted to establish that they were having some sort of positive effect. Compared to the grand promises Johnson made at the beginning of his "unconditional War on Poverty," however, the stories of success he provided were rather limited. Overall, Johnson argued that the programs had helped millions, but also admitted that the programs not fallen short of expectations, and that millions more deserved help.

This type of rhetoric did not begin to appear until 1967, and it was primarily defensive as Johnson fought Congress for continued funding of his programs. Johnson would admit that the War on Poverty did not bring "total victory," but had helped "many millions of Americans take their first steps toward full and

meaningful participation in this society.”¹⁰⁷ At times, he would provide specific numbers. In March of 1967, for example, Johnson outlined how his programs helped 102,500 Americans in a variety of ways.¹⁰⁸ Johnson readily admitted that he did “not have all the answers,” but had nonetheless given a “great many people . . . the opportunity they needed, when they needed it, in a way that called on them to give the best of themselves.”¹⁰⁹ Johnson discussed how the programs served as “sturdy ladders in the deep well of poverty” that helped individuals escape from “hopelessness and despair.”¹¹⁰ Tied together with Johnson’s focus on the hopelessness of the cycle of poverty, Johnson’s rhetoric concerning the effect of his programs would often mention the rejuvenation of “hope” and “self-respect” they spurred.¹¹¹

President Johnson and the Four Paradoxes of Poverty

Interestingly, the politics versus policy paradox actually worked in reverse at the beginning of Johnson’s administration. Due to the remarkable circumstances at the time, including a nation looking for meaning after the assassination of Kennedy, the rediscovery of poverty spurred somewhat by books such as Michael Harrington’s *The Other America*, a strong economy, a president with majorities in Congress, an electoral mandate, and Johnson’s impressive legislative skills—poverty was actually specifically chosen as the ideal issue for Johnson to establish his presidency if not his legacy.¹¹² In 1964 and 1965, the importance of the poverty-policy paradox, therefore, was rather limited, although it likely served to limit the degree to which Johnson tried to avoid raising the cost of the War on Poverty to the point that it would require a specific tax increase. It was not until the latter years that the paradox began to have a noticeable effect as the programs began to fall short of expectations, the economy slowed, and the face of poverty became more and more tied to less popular images such as rioters and criminals. Part of the reason why the politics-policy paradox grew in importance during Johnson’s term is linked to the other three paradoxes.

Evidenced by his variety of arguments that worked to justify his anti-poverty programs, the equality-freedom paradox was clearly relevant within Johnson’s rhetoric. Johnson’s War on Poverty was very much based on the argument that equal opportunity was a cherished American ideal that was being violated by the existence of poverty, especially the environmentally attributed poverty that Johnson depicted. Johnson thus tended to focus attention on the equality side of the tension, and how the lack of equality justified significant action. Like Roosevelt, Johnson could also utilize appeals to freedom based on the notion that those stuck in the “prisons” of poverty did not have freedom, an argument that was most evident during Johnson’s Howard University Address where he sought to go beyond freedom to opportunity. However, in attempting to establish the shame of American poverty in the face of American prosperity through his incessant “hypocrisy” appeals, Johnson actually lessened the sense that significant sacrifice would be necessary. In so doing, Johnson gave the impression that equality for all could be

achieved without the violation of the freedom of some (through higher taxes, the redistribution of wealth, or other means). Again, Johnson supported an activist role for government, but his philosophy was also based on the typical American faith in the free market and the presumption of economic growth providing enough prosperity that with some additional tweaking by government to help the disadvantaged, equal opportunity could still be achieved. At the same time, there was very little sense of responsibility or expectation placed on the poor. The notion of equal opportunity works to transcend the equality-freedom paradox in part because it tempers the expectation of equality by providing an equal starting point while also assigning individuals the responsibility for taking advantage of those opportunities. Johnson never mentioned the responsibility of the poor. In other words, on both counts, Johnson did not confront the equality-freedom paradox, he avoided it.

Perhaps the most obvious point to be made concerning Johnson's rhetoric in terms of the four paradoxes of poverty was the extent to which he defined the poor as deserving rather than undeserving of outside aid. To Johnson, all the poor were victims. On the other hand, Johnson also defined the problem to be the poor themselves, not the system. Although outside forces were to blame for the poor lacking in education, skills, and hope, the solution was focused on changing the poor. Such an argument was precarious, because it was easily susceptible to redefinition that would place the blame solely on the poor. Such was the danger of the culture of poverty thesis, both politically and academically, as Oscar Lewis would attest. What was especially notable about Johnson's framing of poverty was that of the various forms of poverty he outlined, he chose to focus on the most controversial and unpopular, and thus the most likely to be considered undeserving by the non-poor. Johnson made the focus of many of his programs the "hard-core unemployed," rather than the aged, or disabled, or children, or the working poor, or any number of more sympathetic figures. In doing so, he certainly made it more difficult to find political support for his programs, and made it more difficult for his programs actually to be successful. Johnson should be commended for attempting to place the focus on the most difficult cases, although in the long run, that choice likely contributed to his inability to fund these programs fully and ultimately the failure of his programs. Johnson clearly framed the hard-core unemployed as victims of circumstances outside of their control, but the non-poor likely had little sympathy or identification with them.

Lastly, negotiating the help-hinder paradox seemed to be a primary concern of Johnson throughout his time in office. Johnson's rhetoric revealed an understanding of the differences between programs that treat the symptoms of poverty and those that work on the roots of poverty, and the War on Poverty was certainly specifically directed toward the latter. Indeed, what made the War on Poverty different than what was already in place was the switch from treating symptoms to seeking a cure. Johnson was also aware of the possibility of both intended and unintended consequences to government actions. In defending his programs, he took the time to outline some of the successes that had occurred thus far, while

readily admitting their limitations. He did not, however, attempt to explain why his programs did not succeed as he had promised, other than vague references to the need to spend more.

Johnson's anti-welfare rhetoric was particularly interesting. While establishing his programs, Johnson revealed a clear disdain for the "dole," even though he never clearly explained why. Later, in 1967 and 1968, Johnson began to attack directly welfare and its unintended consequences, especially in terms of discouraging work and causing dependency. Johnson signed a bill adding some work incentives and allowing recipients to keep more of their earned money, and also called for more study of welfare's effects. Johnson was silent, however, concerning welfare's prodigious increases in clientele and cost throughout the 1960s, even though those increases were exactly opposite of what he promised in his epitaphs for the "dole" in 1964. Thus Johnson seemed aware of the important differences between welfare programs that solely treat the symptoms of poverty and anti-poverty programs designed to create true opportunity in 1964, but did not attempt to educate the American people on those differences later in his tenure once the public disdain for welfare started on its path to the top of the public agenda. As a result, it can be argued that the backlash against welfare that occurred during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s was essentially consistent with Johnson's rhetoric.

According to David Zarefsky, the War on Poverty's primary impact was rhetorical. On the one hand, Johnson had established that government had an important role in addressing poverty. Johnson's War had, "at least for a time . . . expanded the nation's consciousness of fundamental social problems and inspired dedicated people to attack them. . . . That the government ought to combat poverty became an axiom of politics."¹³ More significantly, perhaps, was the War's rhetorical impact on the liberal argument, which Zarefsky believes was harmed by the limited success of Johnson's programs. The liberal assumptions included the beliefs that the existing order was fundamentally good but in need of reform, that orderly changes must occur through the system, that economic growth was critical, and that the poor can gain without strain to the rich.

As popularly interpreted, the War on Poverty was a program based on these assumptions that failed, thus leading to increased doubt concerning those underlying assumptions. In a manner of speaking, the War on Poverty might have created a chilling effect on anti-poverty programs in the future, representing a clear example that such reform would not be successful. Indeed, by not explaining the failure himself, Johnson allowed others to frame its interpretation. Once the optimistic liberal assumptions were in doubt, the American psyche could fall either to the left or to the right. To the left were more drastic assumptions that relied more on the need for the redistribution of wealth and changes to the system overall, whereas to the right Johnson's ideals of equality were relaxed either due to a notion of the undeserving poor or the perversity thesis that assumes all government programs would backfire. Before leaving office, Johnson remarked that the American people "will soon have to decide how best to help those who cannot earn enough to escape from poverty."¹⁴ Unfortunately for him, he would no longer have

a significant say in that debate. By winning the presidential election in 1968, President Nixon ascended to the position of “chief inventor and broker of the symbols of American politics.”¹¹⁵

Notes

- ¹ James L. Sundquist, *Politics and Policy: The Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson Years* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1968), 3.
- ² David Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1986), 22.
- ³ Sunquist, *Politics and Policy*, 111-12.
- ⁴ This brief review was written primarily through a reliance on the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* for the years 1964 through 1968.
- ⁵ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1966), 69.
- ⁶ Zarefsky wrote, “By 1966, the president had stopped exerting himself to secure the votes of individual legislators. Although Johnson was increasingly preoccupied with Vietnam, his tendency to lose interest in programs was an enduring trait throughout his career.” Zarefsky also wrote that Robert Levine, OEO's Research Director, identified September 1965 as the time when the presidential commitment to the program's expansion was abandoned. Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 84.
- ⁷ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1967, 73.
- ⁸ Steven R. Goldzwig, “LBJ, The Rhetoric of Transcendence, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 25-54.
- ⁹ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 189.
- ¹⁰ As explained in chapter 3, Nixon spun off many of the programs of the OEO into already existing departments.
- ¹¹ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 196
- ¹² For example, Joseph Califano, one of Johnson's most important domestic advisors during his presidency, wrote that Johnson's “commitment to racial justice and to eliminating poverty was genuine and consuming.” See, for example, Joseph A. Califano, Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 10.
- ¹³ Johnson, “Statement by the President on the Report of the Task Force on Manpower Utilization,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1963-1964* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 110.
- ¹⁴ Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress: The Manpower Report of the President,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 357.
- ¹⁵ Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 376.
- ¹⁶ Johnson, “Remarks in Pittsburgh at the Steelworkers Union Hall,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 539.
- ¹⁷ Johnson, “Remarks in Athens at Ohio University,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 631. At the University of Michigan he gave his clearest explication of the Great Society: “The Great Society is a place where every child can find knowledge to enrich his mind and to enlarge his talents. It is a place where leisure

is a welcome chance to build and reflect, not a feared cause of boredom and restlessness. It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community. It is a place where man can renew contact with nature. It is a place which honors creation for its own sake and for what it adds to the understanding of the race. It is a place where men are more concerned with the quality of their goals than the quantity of their goods. But most of all, the Great Society is not a safe harbor, a resting place, a final objective, a finished work. It is a challenge constantly renewed, beckoning us toward a destiny where the meaning of our lives matches the marvelous products of our labor.” Johnson, “Remarks at the University of Michigan,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 704.

¹⁸ Johnson, “Remarks to the 1964 Campaign Conference for Democratic Women,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 597

¹⁹ Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1967* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 9.

²⁰ Johnson, “Remarks at a White House Conference With the Governors,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 369; Johnson, “Remarks at the Governors’ Luncheon,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 373; and Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1968* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968), 142.

²¹ Commencement Address at Howard University: “To Fulfill These Rights,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1965* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 636.

²² David Zarefsky, “Lyndon Johnson Redefines ‘Equal Opportunity’: The Beginnings of Affirmative Action,” *Central States Speech Journal* 31 (1980): 85-94.

²³ The entire quote was “This liberation from want—for which we thank God—is a testimony to the enduring vitality of the American competitive system, the American free enterprise economy.” Remarks in Atlantic City at the Convention of the American Association of School Administrators, *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1966* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1967), 209.

²⁴ For example, in a 1965 speech, Johnson pointed to the “satisfying and encouraging evidence of the job-creating power of a free economy assisted by positive governmental actions and programs at Federal, State, and local levels.” Johnson, “Statement by the President in Response to a Report on the Nation’s Employment Record,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 974-75; in the 1966 State of the Union Address, Johnson said, “Working together, private enterprise and government must press forward with the task of providing homes and shops, parks and hospitals, and all the other necessary parts of a flourishing community where our people can come to live the good life.” Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 6; and in his 1969 Budget Message, Johnson praised the role of the economy in alleviating poverty, but also pointed to those left out of the prosperity: “A major weapon in the fight against poverty is a growing economy, with full use of our human and physical resources. The overall economic expansion of the past 8 years has opened up countless new job opportunities for persons who would otherwise be unemployed or underemployed. And the benefits of our unparalleled levels of prosperity and productivity are widely distributed among our people. Nevertheless, 22 million Americans still living under conditions of poverty do not enjoy the comforts and abundance most of us take for granted.” Johnson, “Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1970,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1969* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 1300.

²⁵ The entire quotation was, “Two years ago—when the unemployment rate was 5 1/2 percent—we concentrated our efforts on stimulating the economy so that it would produce the large number of additional jobs which were needed. Historic decisions were taken to make the economy a better servant

- of human purpose through bold fiscal and monetary policies.” Johnson, “Statement by the President Upon Signing the Manpower Development and Training Amendments,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 1347.
- ²⁶ Johnson, “Remarks Upon Receiving an Honorary Degree at the University of Rhode Island,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 858-59.
- ²⁷ Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 114.
- ²⁸ Johnson, “Remarks on Project Head Start,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 557.
- ²⁹ Johnson, “Statement by the President Upon Making Public a Report ‘Family Breadwinners—Their Special Training Needs.’” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 247.
- ³⁰ Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Economic Opportunity Act,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 989.
- ³¹ Johnson, “Remarks in Los Angeles at a Democratic Fundraising Dinner,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 796-797.
- ³² For example, see Johnson, “Remarks at a Reception for Members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 483; and Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 286.
- ³³ Johnson, “Letter to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House on the Proposed Public Works and Economic Development Act,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 350. For additional examples of Johnson using the “wastefulness” argument, see Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress—‘To Earn a Living: The Right of Every American,’” *Public Papers, 1968*, 46; Johnson, “Letter to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House on the Proposed Public Works and Economic Development Act,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 350; Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress: The Manpower Report of the President,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 279.
- ³⁴ Johnson, “Remarks at Southwest Texas State College, San Marcos,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 1608; Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress: The American Promise,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 286; Johnson, “Statement by the President on Announcing the Youth Opportunity Campaign,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 568; Johnson, “Remarks With President Truman at the Signing in Independence of the Medicare Bill,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 814; Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress on Domestic Health and Education,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 243; Johnson, “Statement by the President Upon Signing Order Providing for State and Local Participation in Federal Manpower Programs,” *Public Papers, 1968*, 890-91; Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress: ‘Education and Health in America.’” *Public Papers, 1967*, 257; Johnson, “Remarks at the Dedication of Fishtrap Dam Near Pikeville, Kentucky,” *Public Papers, 1968*, 1076.
- ³⁵ Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 164.
- ³⁶ Johnson, “Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1965,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 110.
- ³⁷ Johnson, “Remarks to the 1964 Campaign Conference for Democratic Women,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 597.
- ³⁸ Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress on Area and Regional Economic Development,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 327.
- ³⁹ Johnson, “The President’s Inaugural Address,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 73.
- ⁴⁰ Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Food Stamp Act,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 1025; Johnson, “Remarks in Madison Square Garden,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 1560; Johnson, “Statement by the

President: Labor Day, 1967,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 825; Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 380.

⁴¹ Johnson, “Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the Economic Report,” *Public Papers, 1968*, 125-26.

⁴² Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 82. Other similar examples were present in his original message to Congress on the War on Poverty, where he justified the programs “[b]ecause it is right, because it is wise, and because, for the first time in our history, it is possible to conquer poverty.” Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress Proposing a Nationwide War on the Sources of Poverty,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 380; his Labor Day statement in 1968, when Johnson argued that “Never before has a nation been so well equipped to wipe out poverty, ignorance, want, and other ugly forms of human misery.” Johnson, “Statement by the President, Labor Day, 1968,” *Public Papers, 1968*, 922; and during a dinner in Texas in 1968, where he told the audience, “This prosperity has given us more than luxury and a great deal more than leisure. It has given us the opportunity for the first time, really, in our history, to try to attack the ancient enemies of mankind.” Johnson, “Remarks at a Testimonial Dinner in Beaumont, Texas, for Representative Jack Brooks,” *Public Papers, 1968*, 315.

⁴³ Johnson, “Letter to Sargent Shriver on His Appointment To Direct the Program To Eliminate Poverty,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 291.

⁴⁴ Johnson, “Remarks Outside City Hall, Rocky Mount, North Carolina,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 643.

⁴⁵ In a speech less than a week later, for example, Johnson told the crowd that “I cannot believe their poverty is the mark of God's will. They are poor but honest, and they are poor, I think, because they never got a decent break. They never had the chance to break out of poverty's grip and move up to a more abundant life. Johnson, “Remarks to the Newspaper farm Editors Association,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 687.

⁴⁶ Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress: America's Unfinished Business, Urban and Rural Poverty,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 331.

⁴⁷ Examples include: “That need is to provide the basic necessities of a decent home and healthy surroundings for every poor American family now imprisoned in the squalor of the slum,” (Johnson, “Statement by the President Upon Appointing the President's Committee on Urban Housing,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 597); “But if we wish to rid our Nation of crime, if we wish to stop hacking at its branches, we must cut its roots and we must drain its swampy breeding places—and that swampy breeding place, you know where it is—it is in the slums of this Nation. There are very few affluent and educated Americans that are attracted to crime, and very few that have criminal records. But as we bring a fairer measure of prosperity and education to our 32 million poor people in this country, I believe that the crime rate whose growth frightens us tonight will begin to shrink significantly,” (Johnson, “Remarks to the Delegates to the Conference of State Committees on Criminal Administration,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 1208-09); and “For centuries of oppression and hatred have already taken their painful toll. It can be seen throughout our land in men without skills, in children without fathers, in families that are imprisoned in slums and in poverty,” Johnson, “Remarks in the Capitol Rotunda at the Signing of the Voting Rights Act,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 843. Johnson also referred to the poor being “trapped in the ghettos” in his “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 3-4.

⁴⁸ The quote comes from a March 25, 1965, speech where Johnson said, “Worst of all, the distressed area is usually caught in a web of circumstances which block progress and lead to further decline. Johnson, “Special Message to the Congress on Area and Regional Economic Development,” *Public Papers, 1965*, 321.

- ⁴⁹ The Commission's Report was quite clear on its external attribution for the riots, concluding: "Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood—but that the Negro can never forget—is what white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it." *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 10. The report was released on March 1, 1968, but President Johnson did not discuss or support the findings in any detail. On March 22, he was asked at a press conference for his reaction to the public disappointment concerning his reticence about the report, but still failed to support it strongly. Johnson, "The President's News Conference of March 22, 1968," *Public Papers, 1968*, 429.
- ⁵⁰ Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Crime and Law Enforcement," *Public Papers, 1966*, 298.
- ⁵¹ Johnson, "Remarks to the Delegates to the Conference of State Committees on Criminal Administration," *Public Papers, 1966*, 1208-09.
- ⁵² The entire relevant quote was: "But crime prevention also means elimination of the conditions which breed crime. In the words of the Crime Commission, "there is no doubt whatever that the most significant action, by far, that can' be taken against crime is action designed to eliminate slums and ghettos, to improve education, to provide jobs, to make sure that every American is given the opportunities and the freedoms that will enable him to assume his responsibilities. We will not have dealt effectively with crime until we have alleviated the conditions that stimulate it. To speak of controlling crime only in terms of the work of the police, the courts and the correctional apparatus alone, is to refuse to face the fact that widespread crime implies a widespread failure by society as a whole." Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Crime in America," *Public Papers, 1967*, 136.
- ⁵³ Johnson, "Remarks to the Christian Citizenship Seminar of Southern Baptist Leaders," *Public Papers, 1968*, 442-43.
- ⁵⁴ For examples of conservative attacks that focus in part on the Democrats being "soft on crime," see William J. Bennett, *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators: Facts and Figures on the State of American Society* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); and Ben J. Wattenberg, *Values Matter Most: How Republicans or Democrats or a Third Party Can Win and Renew the American Way of Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995).
- ⁵⁵ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1964*, 165.
- ⁵⁶ Johnson, "Remarks at a Reception for Participants in the Conference on Women in the War on Poverty," *Public Papers, 1967*, 517.
- ⁵⁷ Johnson, "Remarks Upon Receiving an Honorary Degree at the University of Rhode Island," *Public Papers, 1966*, 859.
- ⁵⁸ Johnson, "Message to the Congress Transmitting the Second Annual Report of the Office of Economic Opportunity," *Public Papers, 1967*, 640.
- ⁵⁹ Johnson, "Remarks at City Hall, Cumberland, Maryland," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 627.
- ⁶⁰ Johnson, "Remarks Upon Receiving an Honorary Degree at the University of Rhode Island," *Public Papers, 1966*, 859.
- ⁶¹ Johnson, "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1970," *Public Papers, 1969*, 1300.
- ⁶² Johnson, "Commencement Address at Howard University: 'To Fulfill These Rights,'" *Public Papers, 1965*, 638-639.

- ⁶³ Oscar Lewis, "The Culture of Poverty," *Scientific American* 215 (1966): 19-25; and Oscar Lewis, *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty--San Juan and New York* (New York: Random House, 1966).
- ⁶⁴ James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 121.
- ⁶⁵ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 40, 40.
- ⁶⁶ As Zarefsky argued, "Action at any one point of the poverty cycle would be useless without action at every point, to break the hold of an entire way of life. Since the latter was not possible, the former was not fruitful." Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 108.
- ⁶⁷ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 103.
- ⁶⁸ Johnson, "Remarks Outside City Hall, Rocky Mount, North Carolina," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 643.
- ⁶⁹ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1966*, 100.
- ⁷⁰ Johnson, "Remarks at a Reception for Participants in the Conference on Women in the War on Poverty," *Public Papers, 1967*, 517; and Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1968*, 141-42.
- ⁷¹ Gilens cited figures that African Americans only represent 27 percent of poor people, but the median assumption in polls is often 50 percent or more. See Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 68.
- ⁷² Johnson, "Commencement Address at Howard University: 'To Fulfill These Rights,'" *Public Papers, 1965*, 638.
- ⁷³ Johnson, , "Commencement Address at Howard University: 'To Fulfill These Rights,'" *Public Papers, 1965*, 637-38.
- ⁷⁴ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 104.
- ⁷⁵ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1967*, 74.
- ⁷⁶ Johnson, "Remarks at a Meeting With the AFL-CIO Executive Council," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 22.
- ⁷⁷ Johnson, "Statement by the President Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Signing of the Social Security Act," *Public Papers, 1965*, 881.
- ⁷⁸ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1969*, 1325.
- ⁷⁹ For example, Johnson described some of the unemployed as having "the skill and experience to find and hold good jobs." Thus they could be "helped by improvements in our employment services, and by actions to reduce seasonal unemployment." Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The President's Manpower Report," *Public Papers, 1967*, 482.
- ⁸⁰ Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress—'To Earn a Living: The Right of Every American,'" *Public Papers, 1968*, 48.
- ⁸¹ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The President's Manpower Report," *Public Papers, 1967*, 482.

- ⁸² Johnson said, “Until today, minimum wage laws benefited some 30 million workers. Now, as a result of the leadership of this Congress, members of both parties, we raise that number by almost 30 percent—to 38 million workers. This new law benefits 8 million more workers—workers that are not here this morning—workers that you rarely see—workers that you seldom acknowledge: the charwomen, the people who make your beds, the mother who leaves her children at 5 o'clock in the morning to catch the streetcar to come in to have the coffee for the bus driver as he is on his way to work, that works in the cafes, the hotel and motel employees, the laundry workers that clean our shirts and take the spots out of our ties, the workers in the apparel trades.” See Johnson, “The President's News Conference of September 22, 1966,” *Public Papers, 1966*, 1062.
- ⁸³ Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President,” *Public Papers, 1967*, 74.
- ⁸⁴ Johnson, “The President's News Conference at the New York World's Fair,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 668.
- ⁸⁵ Johnson, “Remarks at the Johnson County Courthouse, Paintsville, Kentucky,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 544.
- ⁸⁶ Johnson, “Remarks in Pittsburgh at the Steelworkers Union Hall,” *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 541.
- ⁸⁷ The full story was: “a man told me the other day that he went into a family's home and a little girl was there and she wasn't eating. He said, ‘Why aren't you eating?’ And she said, ‘This is not my day to eat.’ You still have that in this country.” See Johnson, “Remarks to the Members of the International Labor Press Association,” *Public Papers, 1964-1965*, 573.
- ⁸⁸ On one day in May of 1964, Johnson told two stories that referred to his own struggles with poverty: “I know what poverty means to people. I have been unemployed. I have stayed waiting in an employment office, waiting for an assignment and a placement. I have shined shoes as a boy. I have worked on a highway crew from daylight until dark for \$1 a day, working with my hands and sweating with my brow. This has taught me the meaning of poverty and poor. It means waiting in a surplus food line rather than in a supermarket check-out. It means going without running water rather than worrying about whether you can afford a color television. It means despairing of finding work rather than wondering when you can take your vacation. It means coming home each night empty-handed to look at the expectant faces of your little children who lack the things that they need. It means a lonely battle to maintain pride and self-respect in a family that you cannot provide for—not because you don't want to and not because you don't try to, but in a Nation where so many seem to be doing so well you seem to be finding it difficult.” See Johnson, “Remarks at City Hall, Cumberland, Maryland,” *Public Papers, 1964-1965*, 627.
- ⁸⁹ Johnson's story was as follows: “I have just left a tenant farmer's home. I talked to the father and the mother, and the 7 children in that home, and the grandmother. They are good, honest people. They love their country. They want to do right by everybody. They are trying to eke out an existence with 9 acres of tobacco and 10 or 11 acres of cotton, working on the “halves,” with no money, a little old-age pension check and a little advance—seven hungry mouths to feed. But they want to do what is right. That is not much different from the situation that I found myself in after I discovered America. My father was a tenant farmer; he worked on the “halves.” He had a cotton crop that usually ran from 8 to 12 bales a year. He had 5 children. We lived 4 miles from the nearest post office, 4 miles from the nearest school. He wanted his children to have an education. He wanted them to have an opportunity. He wanted to prepare them to assume the responsibilities of the 20th century. With the help of the Government, with the leadership of his neighbors, and with the cooperation of many good men, I was able to go through high school. I pushed a broom and helped myself go through college, and my brothers and sisters had a chance to do so, too.” See Johnson, “Remarks in the City Hall, Rocky Mount, North Carolina,” *Public Papers, 1963-1965*, 639.

⁹⁰ Johnson, "Remarks in New York City Before the 50th Anniversary Convention of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 657.

⁹¹ Johnson said, "But today, when I go through that State, I meet the people who were helped by NYA more than 30 years ago. Most of them are now in their late forties or fifties. Most are responsible and productive citizens. They are doctors, businessmen, teachers, and skilled craftsmen. And it will be hard for their children to understand what poverty is like. That is one of the information gaps of our time; many of our middle-class Americans cannot grasp the elementary facts of life for the poor people of this country.—Many of us wake up in the morning to gentle music of a clock radio. A poor person in America may wake up because there is no heat or because a rat is running across his bed. That is no exaggeration. In one poor neighborhood 40 percent of the 4-year old children identified a picture of a teddy bear as the only animal they knew—a rat. —Middle-class Americans may complain about how hard it is to arrange a house call from a doctor. But a poor person in America may go without a doctor altogether—because there are few doctors' offices located in our slums. The poor in America do not know what the phrase "family doctor" really means. They take their medicine—when they can—usually from the emergency room of a public hospital. And they do not see the same doctor twice. One doctor summed up the relation between illness and poverty very dearly. He said, "The poor get sicker. The sick get poorer." —Middle-class Americans may settle most of their legal problems with ease. But when a poor person reports a violation of the housing code, he and his family may be evicted by the landlord. He cannot afford a lawyer to fight the eviction. Poverty means all of these things—not one by one, but all at once. Each compounds the other. Poverty wears different masks in different places. We think of it as a city disease. But almost half of American poverty is found in our rural areas. We sometimes may think of it as a Negro affliction, but seven in ten poor people are white. Poverty afflicts the old man and it affects the young child. Poverty is found on an Indian reservation, in the hollows of West Virginia, in the migrant camps of Oregon, and here, in Washington, D.C., as well as throughout my State." See Johnson, "Remarks at a Reception for Participants in the Conference on Women in the War on Poverty," *Public Papers, 1967*, 517.

⁹² Another example of Johnson attacking misconceptions concerning poverty: "The recent experience of prolonged prosperity and high employment has pried open the doors of opportunity for many who formerly were shut off from the main circle of abundance. Indeed, sustained prosperity is the single most important source of expanding opportunity. But even prolonged and general prosperity leaves too many Americans untouched, unable to share in its rewards. Despite our prosperity, there are still more than 10 million families whom we classify as poor. They include about one-seventh of our people. Many are Negro. But two-thirds are white. Many are old. But nearly half are children. Many live in urban areas. But about half live in small towns or in rural areas. Most were born poor. Regardless of race, age, or where they live, they are not statistics, they are people. We cannot turn our backs on our fellow Americans who need help." See Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1968*, 141-42.

⁹³ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 141.

⁹⁴ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 22.

⁹⁵ Johnson, "Remarks Upon Signing the Economic Opportunity Act," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 989-90.

⁹⁶ Johnson, "Remarks at a Reception for Members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 483.

⁹⁷ Johnson, "Statement by the President Reviewing the Work of the 88th Congress," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 1202.

⁹⁸ Johnson, "Remarks at the Swearing In of Sargent Shriver as Director, Office of Economic Opportunity," *Public Papers, 1963-1964*, 1360-61.

- ⁹⁹ Johnson, "Remarks Upon Signing the Appalachia Bill, March 9, 1965, Public Papers of the Presidents," *Public Papers, 1965*, 271.
- ¹⁰⁰ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1967*, 83.
- ¹⁰¹ R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 56.
- ¹⁰² Johnson, "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Social Security Amendments and Upon Appointing a Commission To Study the Nation's Welfare Programs," *Public Papers, 1968*, 15.
- ¹⁰³ James Patterson outlined the "phenomenal reduction of absolute poverty" from 1959 to 1973. Poverty dropped from 39 million (22% of population) in 1959, to 32 million (17%) in 1965, to 25 million (13%) in 1968, and 23 million (11%) in 1973. See James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 156.
- ¹⁰⁴ Cited in R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It*, 55.
- ¹⁰⁵ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 151
- ¹⁰⁶ Guida West, *The National Welfare Rights Movement: The Social Protest of Poor Women* (New York: Praeger, 1981).
- ¹⁰⁷ Johnson, "Remarks at a Reception for Participants in the Conference on Women in the War on Poverty," *Public Papers, 1967*, 518.
- ¹⁰⁸ Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on the Community Work and Training Program," *Public Papers, 1967*, 277.
- ¹⁰⁹ Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress: America's Unfinished Business, Urban and Rural Poverty," *Public Papers, 1967*, 340.
- ¹¹⁰ Johnson, "Message to the Congress Transmitting the Second Annual Report of the Office of Economic Opportunity," *Public Papers, 1967*, 641.
- ¹¹¹ For example, during his "Crisis of the Cities" speech, Johnson said, "These programs have brought hope to people in every city and town in America. Children from the slums find a new chance to succeed through Head Start. Poor teenagers earn their first paychecks through a Neighborhood Youth Corps program and stay in school. Needy young men and women, whose talents might once have been their life's frustration, go on to college through Upward Bound. Men find self-respect and good jobs through work training programs. Half a million volunteers are engaged in a mission of service to the destitute of their communities. More than 6 million Americans have been lifted out of poverty. But almost 29 million citizens still remain in poverty." Johnson, "Special Message to the Congress on Urban Problems: 'The Crisis of the Cities,'" *Public Papers, 1968*, 250.
- ¹¹² Carl M. Brauer, "Kennedy, Johnson, and the War on Poverty," *Journal of American History* 69 (1982): 98-119.
- ¹¹³ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 196, 195.
- ¹¹⁴ Johnson, "Annual Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers, 1969*, 1325.
- ¹¹⁵ Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty*, 8.

CHAPTER III

RICHARD NIXON AND THE EMERGENT WAR ON WELFARE

Richard Nixon's record and rhetoric concerning welfare and poverty is a study in contradiction. Nixon's Family Assistance Plan (FAP), if passed, would likely in retrospect be considered the most progressive piece of legislation since the Social Security Act of 1935. On the other hand, compared to the other presidents examined in this study, Nixon was clearly the most critical of the welfare system and the most belligerent to the poor, especially welfare recipients. While he attacked welfare "loafers," however, he also discussed the necessity of helping poor children and the need to support the American "workingman." He attacked the inefficiency of government, but continued to uphold broad ideals concerning full employment. Although he continued to sign the extensions of the Economic Opportunity Acts, he slowly transferred the programs of the Economic Opportunity Act to old-line agencies until the OEO was essentially no longer viable.

This chapter examines how Nixon discussed issues of welfare and poverty. Welfare reform was perhaps the most important domestic issue of Nixon's administration. He spoke on the issue often, including a nationally televised address on August 8, 1969, that attacked the current welfare system and proposed the FAP. As Robert Asen argues, that address clearly exhibited the historical contradictions that plague poverty policy.¹ The legislation was passed by the House of Representatives twice, but never escaped committee to come to a vote in the Senate. To support the program, Nixon released a barrage of attacks on the welfare system in general and the idle welfare poor in particular, which, in the end, symbolized the national shift from the focus on poverty during the Johnson years to a focus on welfare for the next thirty years and counting.

Nixon's Record

Richard Nixon took office on January 20, 1969. The Democrats still controlled both houses of Congress, however, and as a result the first session of the 91st Congress closed with the lowest legislative output in 36 years according to *Congressional Quarterly*. Nixon went to the national airwaves on August 8th to announce his Family Assistance Plan. Under Nixon's plan, every unemployed family of four would receive \$2,400 a year from the federal government, and the working poor would be allowed a minimum of \$1,600 a year up until their earnings reached \$4,000. Adult recipients, however, would be required either to work or to be enrolled in a training program to be eligible.² The draft bill was not sent to Congress until October, and the proposal made little progress the rest of the year, although the House Ways and Means Committee did hold hearings.

In 1970, Nixon did sign a measure continuing appropriations to the Office of Economic Opportunity through fiscal 1971 and another raising the appropriation of the food stamp program. Nixon originally proposed a one-year extension of the OEO on February 19th, but changed his recommendation to two years in June in order to better allow the agency to focus on the “innovative, experimental approach” Nixon envisioned for it.³ As part of that plan, Nixon utilized executive orders to reorganize the OEO, transferring Head Start to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the Jobs Corps to the Labor Department, closing 59 Job Corps camps in the process. Lastly, he signed a sweeping tax bill included a measure that increased social security benefits by 15 percent effective January 1, 1970.

In 1970, the FAP passed the House of Representatives April 16 by a surprising vote of 243-155. The Senate Finance Committee did not vote it out of committee however. They did finally allow a one-year trial version to be considered by the Senate as a whole, but even that limited version was removed from a larger bill in late December. Both the House and the Senate separately passed an additional increase to social security, but the conference committee was unable to reconcile their differences.

Foreign policy dominated the agenda throughout 1971, and many of Nixon’s domestic recommendations remained bogged down in congressional committees. In his State of the Union address, Nixon stressed six great domestic goals for his administration, which included welfare reform, but he was never able to garner significant progress on any of them. The FAP did pass the House of Representatives for the second time, and the Senate Finance Committee began hearings on the legislation. However, Nixon asked for the implementation of welfare to be delayed for a year due to other economic concerns, thus the FAP once again failed to clear the committee and come to a vote in the Senate. According to the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, what had been the president’s top priority had become a “lost priority” by 1971.⁴ In December, Nixon vetoed an appropriations bill for the continuation of the OEO that also provided \$2.1 billion for the establishment of day care centers to help working mothers.

In 1972, any momentum the FAP had finally dissipated. The Senate could not agree on which of three alternatives to focus, so they approved three test programs for 2 to 4 years to gather more information. In the process, the provisions within the FAP specifically designed for the aged, blind, and disabled were separated from the FAP, passed, and signed by Nixon as the Social Security Amendments of 1972. Meanwhile, the OEO was extended for another two years, and Social Security was once again increased across the board and an automatic cost of living increase was added. Congress also attempted to pass a minimum wage bill, but the House and Senate were unable to agree on the final bill to send to the president. After being reelected, Nixon announced his plans for his second term, and welfare reform was no longer given a prominent place on the agenda.⁵

1973 proved a quiet year for welfare and poverty issues. Nixon formally abandoned the FAP in a human resources message in March.⁶ Nixon announced in January that the OEO would be abolished on July 1st, despite being funded through 1974, but a U.S. District Court ruled the premature abolition

unconstitutional. Nonetheless, by December all of the office's functions had been transferred to other agencies and departments except for its community action, legal services, and economic development programs. Congress finally passed a minimum wage bill, but Nixon vetoed the bill on grounds that it was inflationary and did not allow for a subminimum wage for youths. Once again, Social Security benefits were increased, along with SSI benefits.

In 1974, the Watergate crisis resulted in the October resignation of Richard Nixon. Before that resignation, Nixon did sign a minimum wage bill on April 8 that increased the minimum wage to \$2 an hour for most non-farm workers, and extended coverage to more workers, including domestics. It was the first increase since 1966.

Nixon and the Role of Government

Nixon's vision for America and the role of government within that vision did not differ significantly from that of Lyndon Johnson. Nixon continued to glorify an ideal of full employment, and although he tended to express the limitations of government at times, he nonetheless clearly expected government to play a significant role in helping the disadvantaged. Although Nixon was much less dramatic than Johnson in his criticisms of the United States, he was also not satisfied with the present level of opportunity, and expressed concern over the continued existence of poverty and inequality, especially as manifested in the lives of the nation's children. The analysis also examines how Nixon glorified "work," and how that keyword served as the center point of his philosophy. These basic beliefs then served as the basis for Nixon's criticism of the welfare system and his development and defense of an alternative.

During the presidential campaign of 1968, Nixon expressed his perspective on the role of government on a number of occasions. During a campaign speech in Charlotte, North Carolina, for example, Nixon explained that "government will play a great role" in his vision of society. He added that "Government will provide for the field of education all that we all want for our children, the best education that the world has ever seen. Government will provide for the aged and for the needy and all those that cannot care for themselves. Government will provide that equal chance at the starting line."⁷ After the election, Nixon continued to express this activist position of government. In his Inaugural Address, he explained how his administration would not represent a major change in terms of social programs:

In this past third of a century, government has passed more laws, spent more money, initiated more programs than in all our previous history. In pursuing our goals of full employment, better housing, excellence in education; in rebuilding our cities and

improving our rural areas; in protecting our environment and enhancing the quality of life—in all these and more, we will and must press urgently forward.⁸

Although he seemed to agree with Johnson's activist perspective, Nixon tended to back off somewhat from Johnson's broader goals and calls to action in two ways. First, while Nixon envisioned an active government, he also limited the possible impact of government by explaining that government must work better, and must work more in "a new partnership between government and people."⁹ Comments such as "the Federal Government cannot solve all the nation's problems by itself,"¹⁰ and "the need is not to dismantle government but to modernize it"¹¹ were common. He tended, in other words, to combine the role of government with the role of the people, as "partners" or "supplements" to each other.¹² Government remained a necessary entity, but was not considered sufficient on its own.

Second, whereas Johnson used the wealth of the United States as an object of shame in the face of continuing poverty, Nixon framed that wealth as evidence that in general the American system was working well, although it still had flaws. Nixon would brag that the nation had "grown enormously in wealth" and claim that that wealth was "more widely distributed than ever before," but would also admit that "need persists."¹³ During a 1968 campaign speech, Nixon applied this argument to the notion of the American dream:

In America today there are many of us who have been fortunate to have seen the American Dream come true. Most Americans have that equal chance at the starting line, and the only thing that will stop them is their own failure to go up. They can go as high as their talents will take them. But in this land of ours, as you know, there are many Americans--some of them are black Americans, some of them are Indian Americans, some of them are white Americans, some of them are Mexican Americans--who do not have that equal chance. I want a kind of America where every child in this country can have a chance to go as high as his talents will take them. That is what I want. That is what you want and that is the kind of America we are going to build.¹⁴

Nixon criticized the assumption that the War on Poverty started with Johnson's programs, but nonetheless he again pointed to the fact that too much poverty remained:

I can say to you that in our new administration we shall take this country on a new road to progress in which we will recognize this fundamental fact. America is a great nation, but the war on poverty didn't begin five years ago. Let us never forget that. It began when this country began, and it has been the most successful war on poverty ever waged. There's too much poverty left, and we are going to deal with it. But never forget today we have more wealth, more equally shared than in any nation in the world....

You know what created it? America is a great country, not because of what

government did for people, but because of what people did for themselves. That's the answer, and that's the way that we shall move.¹⁵

Said differently, Nixon seemed to consider that the glass was almost full, rather than partially empty. Nonetheless, he did focus some attention and disappointment on the lack of fullness, and clearly supported a role for government to improve the situation.

One additional aspect of Nixon's expression of his philosophy of government relating to poverty is his glorification of work. A number of times Nixon expressed an ideal of full employment, and he justified his somewhat activist perspective on government based on the idea that full employment was not yet realized.¹⁶ This focus on full employment seemed to be directly tied to Nixon's glorification of work. "Work" was clearly a key term for Nixon, and he spent considerable time explaining its inherent benefits and its critical role in the success of individuals and the nation as a whole. He explained, for example, that "Hard work is what built America, and it is time in this country we demonstrate a new appreciation of the dignity of work and what it means."¹⁷ In another speech, he even questioned using the word "welfare" for public assistance, because "when we think about the welfare of this country and the welfare of an individual, in the best sense, that means a job." A job was what was "truly in the best interest of the welfare of the Nation and the welfare of every individual, because with that job comes dignity, dignity that cannot come, of course, from being on public welfare, no matter how high we are able to raise it, no matter how much we are able to do."¹⁸ As I will show in the analysis of Nixon's depiction of the poor, Nixon praised the "workingman," and Nixon's welfare proposals were designed in part to be fair to the "working poor," a group he discussed often in sympathetic terms. Like many of Nixon's arguments, this glorification of work also had a hard edge which turned to criticism of those who supposedly did not accept the "work ethic" that Nixon argued was an integral part of the American character. At times, especially later in his administration, work was elevated at the expense of welfare or "loafing," and the work ethic was measured against the "welfare ethic."¹⁹ While work provided sustenance and dignity, welfare stifled both.

Perhaps the most forceful application of Nixon's admiration for work and disdain for those that did not respect its importance was when he attacked the notion of "menial jobs" during a number of speeches in 1971. Nixon's arguments were in response to a respondent at a hearing who had dismissed the idea of taking a menial job rather than staying on welfare.²⁰ To Nixon, work by definition could not be menial because "any job that puts food on the table and buys shelter and clothing and education for a man's family is not a menial job."²¹ "Scrubbing floors, emptying bedpans—my mother used to do that—it is not enjoyable work," Nixon discussed elsewhere, "but a lot of people do it. And there is as much dignity in that as there is in any other work to be done in this country, including my own."²² To the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Nixon argued that "[n]o job is a menial job if it opens the door to a lifetime of work and the development of self-reliance." He even turned the tables, explaining that the "most menial job" he could

think of was “the one held by the able-bodied person who makes a career out of living off of the hard-earned dollars of his neighbors.”²³ For Nixon, the value of work was derived not only from the product supplied or the wage earned, but also in the dignity it provided and the character it produced.

This glorification of work, therefore, worked alongside Nixon’s acceptance of the ideal of equal opportunity by placing responsibility on the individual to work once it was provided, regardless of the type of work. Equal opportunity, in other words, was a right, but equality as a result was not. “The goal of the American system is not to guarantee everybody a living,” Nixon argued, “it is to guarantee everybody an opportunity, a fair chance, to be rewarded for his work.”²⁴ Full employment was thus the concrete embodiment of the abstract ideal of equal opportunity. If no job was menial and all jobs provide sustenance and respect, and full employment means all who are “able” and searching are employed, then full employment represents equal opportunity. Nixon’s philosophy, therefore, offered a particular balance on the values of equality and freedom based on the government insuring equal opportunity, and the citizen accepting the burden of work.

Nixon’s Categorization of the Poor

Whereas Lyndon Johnson discussed the poor in terms of the four major categories of the unemployables, the working poor, the temporarily unemployed, and the hard-core unemployed, Richard Nixon generally discussed only three categories: the unemployables, the working poor, and idle welfare poor. The first two categories were framed positively, whereas the welfare poor, for the most part, were constructed negatively. The primary rhetorical attribute of Nixon’s depiction of the poor was the manner in which he explicitly dissociated the welfare poor from the rest of American society, especially the unemployables, the working poor, and the “hardworking taxpayer.” Nixon’s attack on the welfare poor was in fact clearly the most pronounced of the five presidents examined in this project. This negative construction of the welfare poor was not as evident early in Nixon’s time in office, but became more and more pronounced as his tenure continued.

The Unemployables

Although Nixon never actually used the term “unemployables,” his rhetoric revealed the typical categorization of “helpless” individuals that could not be expected to care for themselves and thus are the rightful beneficiaries of government largess. Included in the category were “the sick, the disabled, the blind, the needy children and the dependent elderly, the mothers who must care for their children, and cannot work.”²⁵ From the beginning, during the presidential election of 1968, Nixon dissociated those “who cannot care for themselves” from those who can. For the former, Nixon promised to take “great care

of them, the best we possibly can, that this rich nation should be able to afford.”²⁶ He explained that the United States would have “the most generous welfare for everyone who needs it.”²⁷ Nixon even campaigned on the argument that in “many cases” the payments to the unemployables were “inadequate” and “meager.”²⁸ He called often for a “generous” welfare program for those “in need.”²⁹ Each time such generosity was promised, however, it served as an introduction to the companion argument that generosity to those not in need—those able to work—was not appropriate. In his 1971 State of the Union Address, for example, Nixon asked Congress to “generously help those who are not able to help themselves,” and then continued by saying, “But, let us stop helping those who are able to help themselves but refuse to do so.”³⁰ Nixon would also further link the two by arguing that “the way to be able to provide more generously for those who are unable to help themselves is to quit helping those who are able to help themselves and refuse to do so. That is what we have to do.”³¹

Children were a significant part of the “unemployable” category for Nixon. In general, children represent the ultimate symbol of the deserving poor. It is difficult to attribute poverty to a child, which generally means that when the face of poverty is a youthful one, the non-poor would be inherently more sympathetic. Such a phenomenon explains why the public face of poverty is typically *not* a youthful one. Nixon, however, tended to put significant focus on children in his rhetoric. One of the likely reasons was the prevalence of new scientific studies at the time of Nixon’s election that elevated the importance of the health of young children and its impact on the rest of their lives. Nixon, in turn, noted that “There is no single ideal to which this administration is more firmly committed than to the enriching of a child’s first 5 years of life.”³² He hosted a White House Conference on Children in December of 1970, and confirmed that there was a “large and vital role government must play in insuring the best possible opportunity for the child.”³³ One of the myriad arguments against welfare was the negative impact welfare had on “millions of children” who “suffer” in “degrading and deplorable conditions.”³⁴

In the end, Nixon’s celebrated FAP program did not pass the muster of Congress, but one of its remnants that focused only on the unemployables, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), did eventually become law. At the signing of that legislation, Nixon made his support of the deserving poor clear:

It reaffirms and reinforces America’s traditional efforts to assist those of our citizens who, through no fault of their own, are unable to help themselves. America has always cared for its aged poor, the blind, and the disabled—and this bill will move that concern to higher ground by providing better and more equitable benefits. . . . This legislation once again provides dramatic and heart-warming evidence that America is the country that cares—and translates that humanitarian care into a better life for those who need, and deserve, the support of their fellow citizens. The American way of life is the high achievement of our era and the envy of the world, and responsive and responsible legislation such as this is one major reason why.³⁵

SSI specifically targeted unemployables, and the passage of the Social Security Amendments of 1972 brought many of these more clearly “deserving” poor out from the other welfare programs and into their own. One of the important rhetorical implications of that move was its detrimental effect on the public support for the remaining poverty programs. By creating a program specifically for them, Nixon had removed the deserving poor from the larger more general welfare programs such as AFDC. The remaining poor, therefore, were likely seen as more “undeserving” because they were generally healthy and able to work.

The Working Poor

The working poor actually received more attention from Nixon than they did from Lyndon Johnson. The FAP was sold in part because it provided benefits to the working poor, unlike AFDC, which was “unfair” to them. As Nixon explained during the announcement of the FAP on August 8, 1969, with his program “for the first time, the government would recognize that it has no less an obligation to the working poor than to the nonworking poor.” Nixon labeled the working poor as the “forgotten poor” and hoped to provide them a “fair share in the assistance given to the poor.”³⁶ Three days after his nationally televised speech, Nixon continued to focus on its benefits to the working poor in his message to Congress, writing:

The most glaring inequity in the old welfare system is the exclusion of families who are working to pull themselves out of poverty. Families headed by a non-worker often receive more from welfare than families headed by a husband working full-time at very low wages. This has been rightly resented by the working poor, for the rewards are just the opposite of what they should be.³⁷

In a 1971 letter to the House Committee on Ways and Means, Nixon defended FAP by explaining that the “working poor” would be distinguished from the welfare poor, and assigned to the Department of Labor. In that letter, he specifically defined the working poor as “families headed by an individual presently working, but at wages below the poverty level.”³⁸ In 1972, Nixon made a brief comment concerning the working poor that did not appear elsewhere, but is nonetheless critical. During a special message to Congress on welfare reform, Nixon wrote that “[w]e must hit head-on the cruel fallacy that any income, no matter how low, is sufficient for an American family merely because that money comes from full-time work.”³⁹ This admission of the insufficiency of work to escape poverty was significant because it revealed that Nixon was aware of that public misconception. Nixon certainly relied heavily on the argument that welfare was often more attractive than low-wage work when attacking the welfare system, but for the most part that attack was levied through an assumption that welfare benefits were too attractive, rather than the point that low-wage work perhaps was not as attractive as it should be. The FAP would have increased the

value of low-wage work, but that aspect of the program was never a significant focus of Nixon's rhetoric in defense of the FAP.

Nixon also often indirectly praised the working poor through his exaltations of work and "workingmen" in general.⁴⁰ In the end, similar to his depiction of the unemployables, the picture Nixon painted of the working poor could only be properly interpreted through the comparison with the welfare poor.

The Idle Welfare Poor

The final and most important category of poor discussed by Nixon was the idle welfare poor, who received heavy direct criticism from the president, especially during his later years in office. The idle welfare poor were described in many ways. At first, during the campaign of 1968, Nixon would refer to "those who can care for themselves" but evidently were not. His framing of the welfare poor during that campaign consisted primarily of an environmental attribution that placed most of the blame on the welfare system itself. During a 1968 radio campaign speech, for example, Nixon discussed "another category of welfare recipient" distinct from the "helpless" to whom "payments have been worse than inadequate; to them, welfare has become addictive, dulling ambition, penalizing initiative and reaching into another generation to perpetuate dependency. To some Americans, who are not helpless, welfare has become a way of life."⁴¹ The idle welfare poor, from this perspective, were victims of a poorly designed system.

During the address on August 8, 1969, Nixon's seemed to attack the poor in one sentence and then defend them in the next. In his analysis of the speech, Robert Asen argued that Nixon's "attitude toward recipients vacillated between compassion and hostility."⁴² Slowly and surely, however, Nixon's depiction of the idle welfare poor began to rely more and more on dispositional attributions. For example, the progression of statements from Nixon concerning what to do with those able to work but not working reveals a clear trend. During the 1968 campaign, when a man is "able to work," Nixon asked to "give him a job rather than welfare,"⁴³ a rather benign statement. Later in the campaign, he stated "If a man is able to work and if we can find him a job, get him a job. He ought to work and get off welfare."⁴⁴ The addition of "he ought to work" included some sense that the individual may resist work and choose welfare, but was in general still not overly critical. During the August 8th address, after discussing the unemployables, Nixon asked "But what of the others—those who can work but choose not to?" Here, not working had become a choice.⁴⁵

Three days later, Nixon discussed the issue in greater detail in his message to Congress. Again he began by complimenting the poor, but then turned the tables:

I believe the vast majority of poor people in the United States prefer to work rather than have the government support their families. In 1968, 600,000 families left the welfare

rolls out of an average caseload of 1,400,000 during the year, showing a considerable turnover, much of it voluntary. However, there may be some who fail to seek or accept work, even with the strong incentives and training opportunities that will be provided. It would not be fair to those who willingly work, or to all taxpayers, to allow others to choose idleness when opportunity is available. Thus, they must accept training opportunities and jobs when offered, or give up their right to the new payments for themselves. No able-bodied person will have a "free ride" in a nation that provides opportunity for training and work.⁴⁶

A year later, during the mid-term election of 1970, Nixon's tone had become more belligerent with the welfare poor. In a series of speeches delivered as he crossed the country campaigning for fellow Republicans, Nixon began to pit "people who work hard" and "people who pay their taxes" against "people who are not working, and some of them could work if they would just go out and do so."⁴⁷ During a speech in Kansas City, he explained that "if a man is able-bodied, if a man is trained for a job, if a man then is offered a job and if he refuses to work, I say the taxpayers should not subsidize him for loafing."⁴⁸ The charge of "loafing" was leveled on the idle welfare poor in at least ten other speeches during that campaign.⁴⁹ This dissociation between the "loafing" welfare poor and the "hardworking taxpayer" left little to the imagination. It presented not only a clearly dispositional attribution of poverty—thus decreasing sympathy—but also worked to increase the resentment of the welfare poor by focusing on how the taxpayers were footing the bill for the "loafers." Not only were the poor to blame for their poverty, but what income they were receiving was essentially framed as theft.

By the 1971 State of the Union, the argument had progressed to the point where Nixon called for a stop to "helping those who are able to help themselves but refuse to do so."⁵⁰ Later in 1971, Nixon tied his attack on the idle poor with his expression of the ideal of equal opportunity, framing the idle poor as a threat to that goal:

The goal of the American system is not to guarantee everybody a living; it is to guarantee everybody an opportunity, a fair chance, to be rewarded for his work. The American people will not be denied that goal by those who could work or who could take training, but who prefer to take it easy. This is wrong. It is bad for them, bad for the country, and it is especially bad for those who really do need help. The able-bodied people who think they can take a free ride are just going to have to get out and push with the rest of us.⁵¹

Another rhetorical device that Nixon used to support his attack on the welfare poor was the citation of the number of jobs available in the cities that were experiencing significant increases in their welfare rolls. This rhetoric again began in earnest during the mid-term election of 1970, and often consisted of Nixon referring to newspapers with "want ads, pages after pages, offering work for people, and no takers."⁵²

Again, according to Nixon, no jobs could be considered menial, thus any unfilled job during unemployment was disappointing, and blame was inherently placed on the poor.

In sum, Nixon's depiction of the poor focused attention on the almost willful avoidance of work by the idle welfare poor. The idle welfare poor were loafers, who refused to help themselves, and preferred to take it easy and be subsidized by others. Nixon directly juxtaposed the idle poor to the unemployables (who deserved more assistance), to the working poor (who deserved some assistance), and to the taxpayer (who deserved tax relief). Despite the growing negativity directed toward the idle poor, overall Nixon's primary target was the welfare system itself, rather than the recipients of its benefits.

Nixon's Anti-Welfare Rhetoric

The hallmark of Nixon's poverty rhetoric was his all-out attack on the welfare system, which he maintained throughout his time in office. In his nationally broadcast speech August 8, 1969 introducing the FAP, Nixon introduced many of the arguments that would be repeated often throughout the next five years:

Whether measured by the anguish of the poor themselves, or by the *drastically mounting burden* on the taxpayer, the present welfare system has to be judged a *colossal failure*. Our States and cities find themselves sinking in a *welfare quagmire*, as caseloads increase, as *costs escalate*, and as the welfare system *stagnates enterprise* and *perpetuates dependency*. What began on a small scale in the depression 30's has become a *huge monster* in the prosperous 60's. And the tragedy is not only that it is bringing States and cities to the *brink of financial disaster*, but also that it is failing to meet the elementary human, social, and financial needs of the poor. It *breaks up homes*. It often *penalizes work*. It *robs recipients of dignity*. And it grows. . . . The present system creates an *incentive for desertion*. . . . The present system often makes it possible to receive more money on welfare than on a low-paying job. This creates an *incentive not to work*, and it also is *unfair to the working poor*. It is *morally wrong* for a family that is working to try to make ends meet to receive less than a family across the street on welfare. This has been *bitterly resented* by the man who works, and rightly so—the rewards are just the opposite of what they should be. Its effect is to draw people off payrolls and onto welfare rolls—just the opposite of what government should be doing. To put it bluntly and simply—any system which makes it more profitable for a man not to work than to work, or which *encourages a man to desert his family* rather than to stay with his family, is *wrong and indefensible*. We cannot simply ignore the failures of welfare, or expect them to go away. In the past 8 years, 3 million more people have been

added to the welfare rolls—and this in a period of low unemployment. If the present trend continues, another 4 million will join the welfare rolls by 1975. The *financial cost will be crushing*; and *the human cost will be suffocating*....The cost of continuing the present system, in financial as well as human terms, is staggering if projected into the 1970's....We cannot produce productive people with the *antiquated, wheezing, overloaded machine* we now call the welfare system [emphasis added].⁵³

Nixon's attack on the welfare system was wide-ranging and unforgiving. The two most frequent arguments revolved around welfare being anti-work and anti-family, and thus counterproductive. Secondary arguments focused alternatively on how welfare caused dependency, was demeaning and unfair to the poor, caused frustration and violence, was suffering skyrocketing costs, and was laden with waste and abuse. As a whole, these seven arguments painted a picture of a program that harmed everyone and helped no one. The victims of welfare included the deserving poor (who did not receive adequate or equal benefits), the idle poor (who suffered from welfare's perverse incentives), the working poor (whose hard work was not rewarded), taxpayers (who were forced to foot the bill), cities and states (who suffered from the crushing financial burden), welfare workers (who were forced into becoming demeaning "snoopers"), and finally "American society" (which suffers from the various effects of welfare including how it breaks up homes, creates social unrest, and robs children of the "joy of their childhood"). To provide a clear picture of Nixon's rhetoric, I will review how he structured each of his seven criticisms of the welfare system.

Welfare as Anti-Work

The lynchpin of Nixon's attack on welfare was the opposition between work and welfare. Overall, work is associated with responsibility, American values, independence, and self-reliance, whereas welfare is associated with irresponsibility, the rejection of American values, and government waste and dependency. During the campaign of 1968, Nixon constantly called for the need for more Americans on "payrolls" rather than "welfare rolls." Nixon explained early and often how welfare "penalized" work because it created a situation where it was "more profitable for a man not to work than to work."⁵⁴ Indeed, some form of the latter phrase appeared in at least thirteen speeches from 1968 to 1974. In 1972, he actually suggested an Eleventh Commandment: "No one who is able to work shall find it more profitable to go on welfare than to go to work."⁵⁵ Nixon's clearest exposition of these arguments was during a speech at a Republican Governors' Conference in 1971:

The abuses in this system are not only unconscionable, they are contagious as well, as you know. It is a system which not only destroys the incentive of those who are on welfare to get off of it but it attacks the motivation of those who are not on welfare, the

working poor, to stay off. It is incredible that we have allowed a system of law under which one person can be penalized for doing an honest day's work and another person can be rewarded for doing nothing at all. It can happen, and it does happen under the present system. The person on welfare can often have a higher income than his neighbor who holds a low-paying job. Every Governor around this table knows that that is the case in his State. Tragically, these situations often exist right in the same neighborhood, side by side in the same apartment houses, and you can see what the effect is. It is entirely corrosive. It creates bitterness on the part of the worker, and, in the end, I would imagine that it creates resignation, and we end up with just another person on welfare.

“Give up the job. Go on welfare. Everybody else is at the trough, why not me?”⁵⁶

According to Nixon welfare's anti-work nature resulted in a situation where it kept those receiving welfare on welfare by discouraging work, it attracted those not on welfare by offering an easier and more lucrative path than low-wage labor, and it caused resentment and bitterness between the two.

Nixon typically used his Labor Day Address each year to glorify the value of work and attack the welfare system. In his 1972 Labor Day Address, with the election looming, Nixon compared the American “work ethic” with what he termed the growing “welfare ethic.” While doing so, he again pitted the idle welfare poor against the American taxpayer:

Today, this Nation is operating under a system that is rooted in the values that built America: We believe that an able-bodied person should earn what he gets and keep most of what he earns. . . . We believe it is wrong for someone on welfare to receive more than someone who works. . . . We are faced this year with the choice between the "work ethic" that built this Nation's character and the new "welfare ethic" that could cause that American character to weaken. Let's compare the two: The work ethic tells us that there is really no such thing as "something for nothing," and that everything valuable in life requires some striving and some sacrifice. The work ethic holds that it is wrong to expect instant gratification of all our desires, and it is right to expect hard work to earn a just reward. Above all, the work ethic puts responsibility in the hands of the individual, in the belief that self-reliance and willingness to work make a person a better human being. The welfare ethic, on the other hand, suggests that there is an easier way. It says that the good life can be made available to everyone right now, and that this can be done by the Government. The welfare ethic goes far beyond our proper concern to help people in need. It sees the Government, not the person, as the best judge of what people should do, where they should live, where they should go to school, what kind of jobs they should have, how much income they should be allowed to keep. The choice before the American worker is clear: The work ethic builds character and self-reliance, the welfare

ethic destroys character and leads to a vicious cycle of dependency. The work ethic builds strong people. The welfare ethic breeds weak people.⁵⁷

Thus, once again, the flaws of the welfare system threatened much more than taxpayer dollars. The welfare system undermined American values and the American system all together, it destroyed character, and “bred” weak people. Considered together with Nixon’s philosophy of government, it is easy to see why the welfare system became such an important target of reform in his eyes.

Welfare as Anti-Family

The companion argument to welfare being anti-work was welfare being anti-family, especially in terms of welfare providing an incentive for fathers to “desert” their families. The main issue behind these criticisms was the fact the AFDC was primarily available only to families with single mothers, in part due to the original assumptions that most single women would be widows, and thus deserving. During the announcement of FAP, Nixon walked the audience through the argument:

The present system creates an incentive for desertion. In most States a family is denied welfare payments if a father is present—even though he is unable to support his family. Now, in practice, this is what often happens: A father is unable to find a job at all or one that will support his children. And so, to make the children eligible for welfare, he leaves home—and the children are denied the authority, the discipline, the love that come with having a father in the home. This is wrong.⁵⁸

Similar to Nixon’s rhetoric concerning the idle welfare poor, the force with which the system affected the family seemed to grow the longer he stayed in office. Early in his administration, Nixon calmly explained that “[u]nder the present system, sometimes a father must desert his wife and children to make them eligible for benefits.”⁵⁹ Later, he would alternatively argue that the system “breaks up homes,” “disrupts family life,” “drives families apart, instead of bringing them together,” “rewards leaving family,” “encourages families to break up so that they might qualify for assistance,” “induce[s] fathers to leave home so that their families can qualify for welfare,” “contribute[s] to the breakup of poor families, rather than reenforcing the role of the family in our national life,” or “offers a man a bounty to desert his family.”⁶⁰ During the mid-term campaign of 1970, Nixon’s typical stump speech almost always included the point that the welfare system had “the effect of encouraging a man to desert his family rather than to stay with it.”⁶¹ During the same Republican governor’s convention mentioned above, Nixon discussed the effect of welfare on the family in greater detail:

At a time when we see all about us the problems of the disintegration of the family, what we are doing is continuing with the system that encourages family disintegration. And that is what the present welfare system does. Let’s look at the man out of work, or one

struggling to support his family with a low-paying job. He sees that his family can have a higher income on welfare, and yet he is torn by the knowledge that they cannot qualify for welfare as long as he is there in the house—and so what does he do? He leaves. His children grow up either entirely without a father, or with a father who sneaks in and out of the house one step ahead of the welfare worker. Now, what conclusion should his children draw about the morality and the compassion and the justice of a system which forces their father to desert them in order to feed them? This is wrong. It must be changed. We have got to change it in this country, and I pledge to you we will.⁶²

This quotation in particular reveals the complexity of the situation in terms of the attribution concerning the father's act of abandonment. Nixon practically offers sympathy for the father who seemingly would prefer to stay home, but is "forced" to desert his children due to the system.

Secondary Criticisms

Nixon's third typical argument against welfare centered on how welfare caused dependency, which, similar to the anti-work argument, was framed as anti-American, particularly in terms of being anti-freedom. During the 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon devoted an entire speech to welfare that relied primarily on the dependency argument. There he described welfare as "addictive, dulling ambition, penalizing initiative and reaching into another generation to perpetuate dependency," thus becoming "a way of life." Somewhat misrepresenting the origins of the welfare system, Nixon explained that welfare was "designed as a half-way house along the road from poverty to prosperity," but had become "a dead-end street." Once again Nixon tended to blame the system more than the individual, arguing by "locking people who are not helpless into a permanent system of government welfare," the welfare system essentially denied them the "blessings of liberty." Welfare, he continued, "doled out its pittance to the poor and exacted in return their independence and their dignity."⁶³ Throughout his tenure in office, Nixon would return to the argument, often mentioning how the welfare system perpetuates dependency and how his FAP program would work against the spread of dependency. The dependency argument represents an interesting twist within the freedom-equality paradox, as it turns the tables on Roosevelt's economic freedom argument and focuses on how welfare works against freedom while avoiding the issue of poverty altogether.

Nixon's fourth criticism was based on the argument that the welfare system demeaned the welfare recipient. This argument focused on how the various rules and regulations tied to administering welfare required social workers to act as "welfare snoopers"⁶⁴ that were forced to investigate individuals on welfare to make sure they were not co-habiting or receiving payments for working off the books. As a result of these "flagrant invasions of the privacy of those on welfare," Nixon often argued that the welfare

system was “demeaning,” “degrading,” or “dehumanizing” to the poor. He said often that the system “robbed” its recipients of “their pride and dignity.”⁶⁵ During his speech at the White House Conference on Children in December of 1970, Nixon explained how the demeaning quality of welfare influenced children. He argued that a “welfare segregation” had developed as a result of the “stigmatizing of welfare children.” He compared the poverty he grew up in to the poverty suffered by children under the welfare system. Although his family was certainly poor, they did not realize it and were not treated differently. “Today’s welfare child,” he argued, “is not so fortunate.” Nixon explained that even though a poor child in 1970 may actually be less poor in a material sense,

he knows they are poor and he can feel that soul-stifling patronizing attitude that follows the dole. Perhaps he watches while a caseworker—a caseworker who himself is trapped in a system that wastes on policing talents that could be used for helping—he watches while this caseworker is forced by the system to poke around in the child’s apartment, checking on how the money is spent, or whether his mother might be hiding his father in the closet. This sort of indignity is hard enough on the mother. It is enough of a blow to her pride and to her self-respect. But think of what it must mean to a sensitive child. We have a chance now to give that child a chance—a chance to grow up without having his schoolmates throw in his face the fact that he is on welfare and without making him feel that he is therefore something less than other children.⁶⁶

The demeaning argument was tied together with the anti-work argument in the sense that for Nixon work was the ultimate provider of self-respect and dignity, whereas welfare actually took both away. The demeaning argument also focused blame on the system, not the individual.

The fifth criticism was most evident during the campaign of 1968, when the devastating riots of the just completed summer were fresh on the public’s mind. In a number of speeches during that campaign, Nixon would directly attribute blame for the riots on Johnson’s government programs. Nixon questioned the “billions of dollars” that had been spent that had not “worked” but rather “reaped” a “harvest” of frustration, hatred, and violence. In a speech in California, for example, Nixon argued that “[p]rogram after program aimed at establishing domestic tranquility and securing the general welfare has had almost the opposite effect--less tranquility and more violence, more public welfare and less personal well-being.”⁶⁷ This argument, in other words, fit right along with the other arguments whose basic logic was that welfare was counterproductive.

Nixon’s sixth criticism of welfare was its skyrocketing cost. At first, Nixon merely attacked the “billions of dollars” spent on Johnson’s programs and millions added to the welfare rolls “with no end in sight.”⁶⁸ Later, the criticism began to focus more on the impact of rising costs on state and local governments. Nixon argued that the welfare system had become a “crushing and growing financial burden” or a “suffocating burden” that was “driving the States toward fiscal bankruptcy.”⁶⁹ On a number

of occasions Nixon cited specific figures concerning the rapid increase in both the cost of the programs and the number of recipients.⁷⁰ The assumption that these increases would continue was also self-evident within Nixon's rhetoric.

Nixon's final criticism, which focused on the waste and abuse within the welfare system, did not begin to appear consistently until 1972, but became perhaps Nixon's primary attack on the welfare system once the FAP had essentially been scrapped. During a message to Congress in 1972, Nixon introduced a typical argument that would reach a crescendo during the Reagan administration. Citing state "quality control surveys," Nixon revealed that as many as one in twenty welfare recipients were actually ineligible for benefits, and one in four received inaccurate payments. He described welfare as a "quagmire of red tape," a "web of inefficient rules and economic contradictions," and "a crazy quilt of injustice and contradiction."⁷¹ He repeated similar charges and statistics again a year later, adding that the administration of AFDC was "unacceptably loose" and its definitions "inconsistent and unclear."⁷² During his 1974 State of the Union, Nixon commended his own "concerted effort" to improve the administration of welfare programs that had actually stopped the expansive growth in welfare programs from 1972 to 1973. Nonetheless, Nixon went on to claim that 40 percent of AFDC benefits were incorrect as the result of fraud and a system "so complex and so riddled with obscure, obsolete and incomprehensible regulations that it defies fair and efficient administration."⁷³

In summary, when Nixon discussed issues of poverty and welfare, he was primarily criticizing the current welfare system. Through a varied array of arguments, Nixon attacked the welfare system, AFDC specifically, from all angles, to the point that little or no benefit from the system was admitted, and the victims of the system included essentially everyone in American society. Each criticism seemed to pile on the others, as each was framed a sufficient criticism on its own.

Nixon's Alternative: The Family Assistance Plan

Considering the degree to which Nixon disapproved of the welfare system, and, to somewhat a lesser degree, most of its recipients, the development of an alternative was obviously necessary. Nixon's alternative to AFDC and the various programs connected to it was the Family Assistance Plan, or FAP. The plan was in part the result of a new approach toward confronting poverty sparked originally by conservative economist Milton Friedman's concept of the negative income tax. The FAP itself was the brainchild of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who offered his own recollections of the events in *The Politics of Guaranteed Income*.⁷⁴ Nixon introduced the FAP in a nationally televised address in August of 1969, just months after entering office, and spent the next few years defending it and attempting to get the legislation through Congress. The FAP was labeled "Nixon's Good Deed" by historian Vincent Burke, who wrote the definitive history of the origins and ultimate failure of the legislation.⁷⁵ The failure of the plan to become

law is perhaps the ultimate example of the paradoxes of poverty serving as constraints to progress. The plan was attacked from both sides of the political spectrum. Liberals, including welfare rights organizations, attacked the low level of benefits provided and its work requirements. Conservatives balked at the price tag and the millions who would be “added” to the welfare rolls. The question of how much Nixon actually supported the plan remains unclear.

The most significant argument for the FAP was simply that it was not AFDC, which clearly Nixon viewed as a wasteful and counterproductive program. All of the arguments against welfare were inherently arguments for FAP, and indeed Nixon’s framing of the FAP fit well in alleviating the problems Nixon continuously attacked concerning AFDC. The FAP was designed to avoid the disincentives to work and to help families stay together. It was to be simpler to administer, thus produce less waste. By eliminating the need for rules of behavior and the stigma of “the dole,” it also hoped to avoid the demeaning of its beneficiaries. And while the cost would be higher in the short term, Nixon argued it would ultimately prove very cost effective as it beneficiaries left the program.

An examination of Nixon’s framing of the FAP reveals that he sought fundamentally to redefine the purpose of the welfare. His intentions were revealed early, during a nationally broadcast radio speech during the campaign of 1968:

It is time to start anew, to look hard and honestly at the nature, the purpose and the scope of our welfare program. What should a welfare program do? First, it should meet the immediate needs of those who cannot help themselves--the poor, the disabled, the aged, and the sick. And it should do this in a way that preserves the dignity of the individual and the integrity of the family. Second, it should offer opportunity and incentive, for those who can, to move off welfare rolls onto private payrolls.

Nixon thus followed the typical split between the unemployables and the able poor. For the former, the program would change little beyond simplification of the administration and some equalization of the national benefits. For the latter, however, major changes were in store. For them, welfare should become a program whose ultimate goal was to no longer be necessary. Rather than a program that provided sustenance, it was to become a temporary transition program that helped its recipients join or return to sustaining employment. The program thus joined together with Nixon’s typical glorification of work:

Our present approach to welfare, born in the despair of the 1930's, is inappropriate to the 1960's, and would be disastrous in the seventies. . . . The welfare dilemma is this: We have to motivate the able-bodied to get off welfare, without shaming the helpless about accepting welfare. There are reforms we can make in the present system to bring an end to that dilemma. A man in need is still a man with self-respect. Ours is a work-oriented society, and most Americans—including those on welfare—seek employment.

Later in the speech, Nixon was even more clear on his new vision of welfare:

While we are taking these steps we must keep in mind one critical goal of a welfare program: Helping everyone capable of work to secure the blessings of economic liberty. Our emphasis should be on creating the conditions that will enable people to break away from welfare. . . . Welfare in America must do more than help a human body survive; it must help a human spirit revive, to take a proud place in the civilization that measures its humanity in terms of every man's dignity.⁷⁶

The critical point here is that welfare, at least the AFDC program that represented welfare for most people, was not designed as a temporary measure or to encourage its recipients to become self-sufficient. For the able poor on AFDC, Nixon was calling for a fundamental change in purpose. The goal—sustaining work for all able-bodied Americans—was actually the same on Johnson's goal for the War on Poverty. The difference, however, was that Johnson tended to avoid associating his programs with welfare, while Nixon addressed the welfare system head on.

During his national address announcing the FAP, Nixon proposed to “abolish the present welfare system” and replace it with a program that, unlike the current system, is “designed to correct the condition it deals with and, thus, to lessen the long-range burden and cost.” He explained that the American people “cannot talk our way out of poverty; we cannot legislate our way out of poverty; but this Nation can work its way out of poverty. What America needs now is not more welfare, but more ‘workfare.’”⁷⁷ In his message to Congress on the legislation three days later, Nixon emphasized that his “new approach” would “make it more attractive to go to work than to go on welfare.” He explained that his proposal would provide a “basic income” to those American families that could not care for themselves, and then allow for those families “good reason to go to work” by allowing them to keep the first sixty dollars a month without a reduction in benefits. He proposed that the program apply to those presently working in order to “encourage them to go on working and eliminate the possibility of making more from welfare than from wages.” All “employable persons” would be required to register for work or job training to receive benefits, and Nixon promised additional job training and day care facilities in order to meet the new demand.⁷⁸ Throughout the remainder of his time in office, he continued to defend the FAP with the same arguments: a floor of dignity for unemployables, work incentives for the able poor, and fairness to the working poor with the goal of creating self-sufficient independent families.

One final important point concerning Nixon's defense of his program concerns his attempt to differentiate the FAP program from a guaranteed income program. The two programs were similar in the sense that they essentially worked as a negative income tax by relying on a sliding scale of benefits designed to reduce benefits as income from work increased, but at a rate that would maintain the actual benefit of working. The distinction, according to Nixon, was the inclusion of the work or training requirement for the recipients.⁷⁹ Otherwise, Nixon argued, the program would continue to discourage

work. Indeed, by 1972, Nixon had begun to refer to his welfare reform plan as “workfare” in order to emphasize the work requirement and further distance himself from the perception that the plan offered a guaranteed income.⁸⁰

Nixon and the Dilemmas of Poverty

Nixon’s experience with the Family Assistance Plan perhaps represents the most obvious example of how the paradoxes of poverty make significant reform difficult. Nixon represented a good chance for serious reform of the nation’s welfare system. As explained by Vincent Burke, Nixon “liked to think of himself as a modern-day Disraeli, a Tory bringing social progress.”⁸¹ According to Burke, he was convinced by Moynihan that he could establish his legacy by reforming the despised welfare system,⁸² but in the end, no form of the legislation ever made it to his desk for his signature. The innovative nature of the program with its sliding benefit scale seemed to have been designed to negotiate the deserving-undeserving and help-hinder paradoxes directly, but Nixon still could not overcome the politics of poverty.

Equality versus Freedom

Nixon seemed to offer a similar philosophy of government as Johnson, at least in the beginning. The role of government was to help achieve the goal of equal opportunity, primarily through full employment. Whereas Johnson tended to focus on the lack of equal opportunity and the need to provide more opportunity for the nation’s disadvantaged, especially the “hard-core unemployed,” Nixon’s rhetoric revealed a sense that the real was not as far from the ideal. Nixon still admitted that a gap remained, and that government still had a role in addressing the gap, but for Nixon the main impediment to the realization of equal opportunity was the welfare system, not the cycle of poverty and its various component parts. Thus whereas Johnson’s representative poverty group was the hard-core unemployed, Nixon’s representative group was the idle welfare poor.

Considering Nixon’s anti-welfare rhetoric, welfare actually violated both of the primary American values of freedom and equality. The dependency welfare inevitably caused worked against freedom, while welfare’s disproportionate relationship with the idle poor, working poor, and taxpayers made it a vehicle of inequality. Later in his administration, when Nixon began to focus more and more on the cost of the welfare system to taxpayers, he expressed the ideal that “an able-bodied person should earn what he gets and keep most of what he earns.”⁸³ He was thus framing welfare as a violation of the freedom of others as well. In sum, by all counts, welfare undermined American values.

Nixon’s glorification of work is also relevant to the freedom-equality paradox. For Nixon, work was the polar opposite of welfare and thus the key to negotiating the tension. Government had the

responsibility to insure the opportunity to work to its able-bodied citizens in order for them to have true freedom, and the citizens must take the responsibility to accept what work was available. The problem with relying on work as the solution to the equality-freedom dilemma is that it requires a number of additional assumptions to function properly. There must be jobs available for all able-bodied, those jobs must be sufficient to provide a decent standard of living, the able-bodied must have the skills and education to succeed at those jobs, and finally the able-bodied must be willing to accept the job and do their part. Nixon seemed to take the first and third assumptions for granted for the most part, although he did to some extent support the creation of public jobs and the continuation of unemployment and manpower training programs.⁸⁴ The question of whether the jobs would be sufficient to provide a decent standard of living, however, was an important question for Nixon. On one hand, Nixon's insistence that no work was menial because it provided dignity and respect and "put food on the table" seemed to imply that any work was sufficient to provide true freedom (and thus equality). On the other hand, Nixon also referenced "the cruel fallacy that any income, no matter how low, is sufficient for an American family merely because that money comes from full-time work."⁸⁵ The FAP was designed in part to alleviate some of the deficiency from low-wage labor by providing an income benefit to the working poor to supplement their wages. While Nixon did discuss this supplement at times, it was clear from his rhetoric that he choose to focus on how the FAP would require work and decrease the relative value of welfare, rather than increase the relative value of low wage labor.

The final remaining assumption necessary for work to qualify as the primary instrument of equal opportunity was the question of whether the able-bodied were willing to accept the job. Nixon's continuous criticism of welfare "loafers" along with his attack on those who rejected menial jobs certainly made his opinion clear on this matter. For Nixon, this final requirement was the responsibility of the individual, not the government. As Nixon explained, "if a man is able-bodied, if a man is trained for a job, if a man then is offered a job and if he refuses to work, I say the taxpayers should not subsidize him for loafing."⁸⁶

Rather than focusing on the lack of equality within the American system in terms of rich and poor, Nixon chose to focus on the lack of equality of treatment and effort between the working poor, the "hardworking taxpayer," and the idle welfare poor. Rather than the existence of poverty being framed as anti-American and a violation of freedom, the "morally bankrupt" welfare system and the dependency it caused to its recipients and the financial burden it cost to everyone else was framed as anti-American and a violation of the freedom of both groups. In the end, the welfare system, and the character flaws of the "loafing poor," were the only major impediments to the American system.

Deserving versus Undeserving

The notions of the deserving and undeserving poor were clear in Nixon's rhetoric. He argued for increased and less stigmatizing benefits for the unemployables and fairness for the working poor, which he alternatively labeled the "forgotten poor." The idle welfare poor, however, were targeted for heavy criticism, especially later in his administration. Nixon strongly supported the growing public assumptions concerning the laziness of the able-bodied on welfare, and at times provided a clear dispositional framing that implied many of the people on welfare had chosen the "free ride" of welfare rather than taking jobs which were evidently available and inherently non-menial. Nixon encouraged the growing resentment between the "hard-working taxpayer" and the welfare "loafer," and tended to sell the FAP more on the grounds that it would force these idle poor to work rather than because it would provide benefits to the working poor.

Even though Nixon's rhetoric distinguished between the deserving and undeserving poor, and was quite critical of the latter, the program his rhetoric was attempting to sell would likely have blurred the distinction between the deserving and undeserving. By offering benefits to all families under the poverty line in a graduated fashion, all three groups of the poor that Nixon had pitted against each other—the unemployables, the welfare poor, and the working poor—would all receive varying benefits from the same program. By including the working poor within his program, Nixon was expanding the program to millions that were not previously eligible for AFDC, millions that were generally considered sympathetically by the non-poor. The critical issue was whether the recipients of the FAP as a whole would be perceived more as the undeserving idle poor or the deserving working poor. Considering Nixon's work requirement, one could assume the dominant perception would have been of the latter. Due to the failure of the legislation to pass, that question was never answered.

Part of the downfall of the FAP was the perception held by many conservatives that the program would add millions to the "welfare rolls." The program would indeed add millions that would be receiving income benefits from the federal government, but those rolls would no longer be welfare rolls for many of those millions, at least in terms of how most interpret the meaning of welfare. Similar to how the program brought together the working poor and the welfare poor, it also melded both work and welfare together. They would no longer have been the polar opposites that Nixon described. The FAP combined the two to varying degrees, and most of its recipients would have been working at least part time.

Ironically, when the FAP was finally abandoned and the only section that became law was the SSI, the effect on the deserving – undeserving line was directly the reverse. Because SSI was targeted solely on the unemployables, essentially members of the deserving poor such as the aged, disabled, and sick, the program actually increased the division between the deserving and undeserving poor. SSI essentially removed a large group of the deserving poor from the population receiving welfare, leaving

those left behind with less of a chance for public support. Nixon spent five years attacking the idle welfare poor while defending a program that would essentially end that category. In the end, the insults remained, and the welfare poor were left with even less public support.

A final necessary point concerning Nixon's depiction of the deserving-undeserving poor is the manner in which the idle welfare poor were overwhelmingly framed as men. Perhaps this could be explained simply through the grammatical conventions of the day, but the fact remains that a large majority of the welfare poor during the early seventies were either women or children. The FAP would certainly assist many men who were presently the working poor, and perhaps, if Nixon's logic held, more men would utilize the benefits as an incentive to stay home with their families and work, but the percentage of beneficiaries of the FAP, or AFDC for that matter, that were men was minimal. By depicting the idle poor as men who had chosen not to work, Nixon was misrepresenting the difficulty of the situation. Finding suitable and sustainable work is much more difficult for single mothers, because not only did they tend to have less skills and experience, but going to work would also require child-care. Requiring the mothers of young children to work was especially controversial, but Nixon seemed to avoid these dilemmas by focusing on the limited image of the male idle poor.

Help versus Hinder

Whereas Johnson introduced some of the basic anti-welfare arguments late in his term in office, Nixon practically elevated welfare bashing to an art form. By identifying the welfare system as an anti-work, an anti-family program that demeans the poor and leads to dependence, high costs, waste and abuse, and violence, Nixon was placing himself quite firmly on the hinder end of the help-hinder tension. Indeed, Nixon did not clearly mention a single benefit of welfare.

Nixon's FAP plan seemed to be designed with a specific understanding of some of the dilemmas inherent in devising an anti-poverty program. At one point, for example, Nixon explained the "welfare dilemma" as the need to "motivate the able-bodied to get off welfare without shaming the helpless about accepting welfare."⁸⁷ The FAP was also designed not to encourage the already working to stop working, but in order to do so, the program had to be expanded to cover the working poor, and the cost of such an expansion was certainly one of the reasons the program failed politically. One of the primary difficulties of establishing any benefit for the disadvantaged is to draw the eligibility line. Wherever it is drawn, those just above it would be provided an incentive to fall behind and thus take advantage of the benefit. Those just below would lack any incentive to move up, for fear of losing the benefit. The FAP sliding scale of benefits in part avoided such problems. By having the benefits adjust slowly with income, the relative benefit at each point on the scale decreased, while the overall benefit to increase income remains

throughout. Nonetheless, in order for such a gradual sliding scale to function properly, the program had to span a much wider range of incomes, which in the end proved politically untenable.

Nixon's attack on welfare was clearly unbalanced. Again and again he repeated all the various possible sins associated with the program as if they were obvious, even though many of the cause-effect relationships Nixon identified—such as welfare's negative effect on work ethic and family decisions—remain controversial issues for social scientists to this day. Nixon's exaggeration can be partly understood considering he was attempting to pass legislation that would abolish the program he was bashing and his proposal was designed to avoid many of the specific perceived sins of its predecessor, but, once again, when the program failed, all that was left was the negative public image of welfare and its recipients that Nixon continuously emphasized. In a similar vein, in the process of selling the FAP, Nixon redefined the purpose of welfare, moving away from sustenance to a program with the intent of helping individuals achieve self-sufficiency. When the FAP died and AFDC continued, the welfare system remained tied to sustenance, but the public perception likely was more focused on developing the need for self-sufficiency. This mismatch between the designed and assumed purpose certainly contributed to the public's negativity toward welfare.

Politics versus Policy

The politics versus policy paradox plays a key role in the downfall of the FAP. Again, the failure of the FAP is perhaps the clearest example of the power of the paradoxes and the difficulty of being prudent in the American political system. In the beginning, there was good reason for optimism. The FAP was certainly designed as a program that would attempt to balance competing perspectives concerning welfare and poverty. It was developed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, formerly of Lyndon Johnson's administration, and then proposed by Richard Nixon, a Republican president, to a predominately Democratic Congress. It was a mix of carrots (increased benefits and more work allowances) and sticks (work requirements). It would force some of the so-called "idle poor" to work, but it also extended benefits to millions previously not covered, and was designed to reduce the demeaning aspects of public assistance by blurring the line between the unemployables and the working poor.

Unfortunately, like many proposals designed to balance competing perspectives, the FAP was also attacked from both sides of the political spectrum. As Asen explained, "[a]udiences reacted to the FAP as both a reckless expansion of the existing welfare system and a draconian imposition of work requirements on poor mothers."⁸⁸ The FAP theoretically worked against the disincentives to work and incentives to break up families, key conservative concerns, but did so at the expense of added costs and an expanded federal government. In general, Nixon's rhetoric in defense of the FAP was rather conservative, but Nixon and the other FAP supporters could not seem to avoid the frame that the FAP represented an

increase in the nation's welfare rolls. Considering the attacks Nixon was levying on the welfare system, expanding it seemed counterintuitive to conservatives. Although the lack of strong support from conservatives was detrimental to the case of the FAP, it should also have been somewhat expected. The FAP was an expensive program that essentially guaranteed a minimum income to millions of Americans, and represented a significant increase in the number of people assisted economically by the federal government. Even though based on the ideas of Milton Freeman, the FAP still seemed to be a clear step away from free market principles and self-reliance.

The lack of support from the American left, however, is more difficult to understand, especially in retrospect. Burke was especially critical of the liberal reaction to the FAP, writing: "Nixon's failure to advertise the truth about his radical bill, which would have alienated his natural constituency, cannot excuse the liberals for failing to recognize it and support it, for failing to educate *their* constituency."⁸⁹ A number of issues that partly explain the liberal opposition to the FAP can be noted. First, the program was introduced by a Republican president, and was for the most part cloaked in conservative rhetoric that was at times rather derogatory to the poor. Second, there was likely a sense from many on the left that patience would be rewarded with a more generous program. Unfortunately for the left, the opposite was actually true, as the public support for government programs in general and welfare programs specifically decreased throughout the rest of the century to the point that the FAP would have been considered far too generous of a program if introduced in the eighties or the nineties. Third, the guaranteed floor remained rather low. For example, a family of four under the plan would still be approximately \$2000 under the official poverty line.⁹⁰

Exhibiting yet another of the inherent difficulties to poverty programs, the proposal's support suffered in part because it would have affected different liberal groups to varying degrees. One of the more controversial aspects of the FAP to those on the left was that it would have brought more equality to the nation's income support rates. The rates would still be adjusted for geographical cost of living, but otherwise would have been equal. At the time, there was a wide variety in the rates from state to state and even from city to city. The larger cities in the north had higher than average rates, even after being adjusted for inflation. As a result, recipients of welfare in those cities would have received little or no additional benefit from the FAP, while recipients in the southern states, where rates were far below average, would have received an increase. The problem was that the development of welfare rights organizations and the community action groups coming out of the War on Poverty programs were tied primarily with the recipients from these larger cities. The influential National Welfare Rights Organization, for example, lobbied hard against the FAP.⁹¹

In addition, the nation's unions were against the FAP because it would decrease the relative power of their organizations. If the federal government guaranteed a minimum income, and those benefits were available even to the working poor, the federal government was essentially usurping one of the more

important roles of the unions—providing some semblance of security to the working poor. Union leader George Meany, for example, argued that “Decent wages are the obligation of the employer, not of the taxpayer.” As a result, both the AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers “vigorously” opposed the bill.⁹²

The left was also weary of the FAP’s work requirements. Work incentives and work requirements became part of the welfare system starting with the 1967 amendments, although at that point they applied only to a small percentage of welfare recipients. The FAP would have greatly expanded the role of both work incentives and requirements, although, again, the FAP did allow for a category of unemployables that would not be expected to work, including single mothers of young children over three years old.

The framing and subsequent public perception of these work requirements is critical to their support or lack thereof. From one perspective, a work requirement could practically be framed as forced labor or even slavery, especially, as Nixon argued, when no work was considered menial. On the other hand, a work requirement puts significant pressure on government to insure that work is available and viable. Welfare certainly had its problems, but it was also a rather cheap way for the government to sustain those in poverty. If all the able-bodied were expected to work, the government would likely have to deal with some of the difficult issues involved. As long as welfare continued, it tended to garner most of the attention and distracted from other important issues.

Additionally, work requirements can be criticized because they may not represent the best path to true self-sufficiency. For the unskilled and uneducated, the range of suitable jobs is rather narrow, and these jobs rarely hold much promise for advancement. For many, a better long-term solution would focus on increasing education and developing additional skills, rather than focusing on any available work. Finally, the left was likely critical of the FAP’s underlying assumptions that there would be enough suitable jobs for all the able-bodied poor that would be sent into the work force. The fact that the FAP’s benefits extended to the working poor should have alleviated some of these concerns, but, again, Nixon’s rhetoric tended to focus on the FAP’s anti-loafing aspects rather than the benefits it provided to the working poor, which likely did not help the situation.

Race also likely played a role in the downfall of the program, considering by the 1970s many voters were already assuming welfare was primarily a program for minorities. Similar to Johnson, Nixon tended to dissociate race and welfare, although the public likely did not maintain that dissociation. Minorities were disproportionately represented in the programs, but they were also disproportionately poor, and a majority of welfare recipients were white.

Even Nixon’s support for the FAP was unclear. Rhetorically, he continued to label the proposal a top priority, but the question of whether he would rather have the program or the political issue is unclear. Clearly one of the reasons Nixon introduced the plan was it represented a win-win situation for him. If it passed, he reformed a hated institution, and if it did not, he could blame the Democratic Congress for continuing one. During the 1970 and 1972 elections, it seemed more and more that Nixon preferred the

latter. During the 1970 mid-term elections, for example, welfare reform was a topic in almost every speech, but Nixon primarily used his time to bash welfare recipients as loafers rather than sell the specifics of the FAP program.

In conclusion, the Nixon years represent a fascinating time in the history of American welfare and poverty politics. The FAP plan would have revolutionized how the nation treated poverty. By blurring the lines between the deserving and undeserving poor and between work and welfare, it would also have dramatically altered the rhetorical dimensions of poverty. In some ways, the situation seemed ideal for a major and necessary prudent change to the nation's anti-poverty program. The failure of the FAP represents a clear example of the difficulty of negotiating the political paradoxes of poverty. Nixon did seem to be cognizant of some of the dilemmas of poverty, but he also clearly avoided others and presented an unbalanced view of the merits and flaws of welfare and its recipients. Perhaps to satisfy his political needs, he tended to focus much more on the evils of welfare rather than the considerable benefits to the FAP.

If the FAP was enacted, however, the nation's focus perhaps would have shifted from welfare's perverse incentives and the deserving and undeserving poor and to the more significant issues of the availability and sufficiency of low-wage labor and the appropriate public response to the growing number of single mothers. FAP's failure, however, only worsened the situation as Nixon's public criticism of the welfare program and its recipients likely contributed to the public's animosity. During Nixon's years in office, the shift from the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare began in earnest and would continue into the 1990s.

After Nixon's resignation, Gerald Ford completed Nixon's second term, but never placed welfare or poverty high on his agenda. Ironically, while Ford did not address these issues to any significant extent, he did sign into law one of the most significant anti-poverty programs in American history, particularly to the working poor. In a tax bill in 1976, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was created. The program works somewhat as a negative income tax by providing a refund to the working poor. The benefit was only available once a year, but nonetheless was significant in bringing millions above the poverty line and making low-wage labor more sustainable. The program was also targeted specifically to the deserving poor, thus could be expected to continue to receive significant political support. Ford's role in the development of the EITC appeared rather minimal, however, as he did not even mention the EITC, positively or negatively in his public papers.

Notes

- ¹ Robert Asen, "Nixon's Welfare Reform: Enacting Historical Contradictions of Poverty Discourse," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4 (2001): 261-79.
- ² For details on the original proposal, see R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 57-60.
- ³ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1970), 813.
- ⁴ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1971* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1972), 519.
- ⁵ Nixon, "Remarks on Plans for the Second Term," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1972* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 1147.
- ⁶ Nixon, "State of the Union Message to the Congress on Human Resources," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1973* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974), 133.
- ⁷ Nixon, "Charlotte, NC, Campaign Speech, September 11, 1968," in *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*, CD-Rom (Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 2000).
- ⁸ Nixon, "Inaugural Address," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1969* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 2.
- ⁹ Nixon, "Special message to the Congress on Forthcoming Legislative Proposals Concerning Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 287.
- ¹⁰ Nixon, "Special message to the Congress on Forthcoming Legislative Proposals Concerning Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 287.
- ¹¹ Nixon, "Statement on Establishing Common Regional Boundaries for Agencies Providing Social and Economic Services," *Public Papers, 1969*, 256. In his nationally televised address on welfare reform, Nixon repeated the "urgent need" to "modernize our institutions." Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Program," *Public Papers, 1969*, 637-38.
- ¹² For example, "The task of this Government, the great task of our people, is to provide the training for work, the incentive to work, the opportunity to work, and the reward for work. Together these measures are a first long step in that direction." Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 644; and also "More than ever, America needs the enlistment of the energies and resources of its people—not as substitutes for government action, but as supplements to it. People can reach where government cannot; people can do what government cannot." Nixon, "Statement on Government Support of Voluntary Action," *Public Papers, 1969*, 340.
- ¹³ Nixon, "Statement on Government Support of Voluntary Action," *Public Papers, 1969*, 340.
- ¹⁴ Nixon, "Oklahoma City, September 7, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ¹⁵ Nixon, "Anaheim Rally, September 16, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*. The same message was repeated in a speech in Denver on November 25.
- ¹⁶ Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs, August 8, 1969," *Public Papers, 1969*, 638; Nixon, "Message to the Congress: The Economic Report of the President," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1970* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971), 68-

- 69; Nixon, "Message to the Congress Transmitting Annual Manpower Report of the President," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1971* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972), 521; Nixon, "Remarks at the Republican Governors Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia," *Public Papers, 1971*, 557.
- ¹⁷ Nixon, "Remarks to the AFL-CIO Ninth Constitutional Convention in Bal Harbour, Florida," *Public Papers, 1971*, 1124.
- ¹⁸ Nixon, "Remarks at a Luncheon of the National Alliance of Businessmen," *Public Papers, 1969*, 221.
- ¹⁹ See, for example, Nixon, "Statement on Signing a Bill Amending the Social Security Act," *Public Papers, 1971*, 1213.
- ²⁰ At the Republican Governors Conference in April, 1971, Nixon said, "I advocate a system that will encourage people to take work, and that means whatever work is available. It does not mean the attitude expressed not long ago at a hearing—I read about it in the paper and heard it on television. A lady got up at a welfare hearing, and she screamed, 'Don't talk to us about any of those menial jobs' I am not sure what she considers a menial job, but I have probably done quite a few in my lifetime." Nixon, "Remarks at the Republican Governors Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia," *Public Papers, 1971*, 555.
- ²¹ Nixon, "Remarks to the AFL-CIO Ninth Constitutional Convention in Bal Harbour, Florida," *Public Papers, 1971*, 1124.
- ²² Nixon, "Remarks at the Republican Governors Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia," *Public Papers, 1971*, 555.
- ²³ Nixon, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce: 'The Right To Be Confident,'" *Public Papers, 1971*, 586. Nixon repeated attacks on the notion of menial jobs in his "Address to the Nation on Labor Day," *Public Papers, 1971*, 935; "Remarks to the AFL-CIO Ninth Constitutional Convention in Bal Harbour, Florida," *Public Papers, 1971*, 1124; "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Guests Following a Dinner at Secretary Connally's Ranch in Floresville, Texas," *Public Papers, 1972*, 567.
- ²⁴ Nixon, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce: 'The Right To Be Confident,'" *Public Papers, 1971*, 586.
- ²⁵ Nixon, "Radio Campaign Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ²⁶ Nixon, "Campaign speech, September 10, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ²⁷ Nixon, "Radio Campaign Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ²⁸ Nixon, "Radio Campaign Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ²⁹ For example, Nixon also called for generosity during the campaign speeches at White Plains, NY; and Westchester County Community Center, Syracuse, NY. *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*. Also see Nixon, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1971*, 52; "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce: 'The Right To Be Confident,'" *Public Papers, 1971*, 586.
- ³⁰ Nixon, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1971*, 52.

- ³¹ Nixon, "Remarks at the Republican Governors Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia," *Public Papers, 1971*, 556.
- ³² Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 642.
- ³³ Nixon, "Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Children," *Public Papers, 1970*, 1127-1128.
- ³⁴ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform," *Public Papers, 1972*, 502.
- ³⁵ Nixon, "Statement on Signing the Social Security Amendments of 1972," *Public Papers, 1972*, 1071.
- ³⁶ Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 640, 644. Later, in his Budget Message of 1971, Nixon referred to the working poor as the "long-neglected working poor." Nixon, "Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1971," *Public Papers, 1970*, 63.
- ³⁷ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Reform of the Nation's Welfare System," *Public Papers, 1969*, 651.
- ³⁸ Nixon, "Letter to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the House Committee on Ways and Means About the Welfare reform Bill," *Public Papers, 1971*, 496.
- ³⁹ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1970*, 503.
- ⁴⁰ See, for example, Nixon, "Statement About Labor Day, 1969," *Public Papers, 1969*, 684.
- ⁴¹ Nixon, "Radio Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ⁴² Asen, "Nixon's Welfare Reform," 264.
- ⁴³ Nixon, "Michigan Speech, October 29, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ⁴⁴ Nixon, "Syracuse Speech, October 29, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ⁴⁵ Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1970*, 640-641.
- ⁴⁶ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Reform of the Nation's Welfare System," *Public Papers, 1969*, 652.
- ⁴⁷ Nixon, "Remarks on Arrival at Lancaster, Pennsylvania," *Public Papers, 1970*, 870.
- ⁴⁸ Nixon, "Remarks in Kansas City, Missouri," *Public Papers, 1970*, 896.
- ⁴⁹ See Nixon, "Remarks in the Ohio State House, Columbus, Ohio," *Public Papers, 1970*, 880; Nixon, "Remarks at Longview, Texas," *Public Papers, 1970*, 979; Nixon, "Remarks at East Tennessee State University," *Public Papers, 1970*, 905; Nixon, "Remarks in Dundalk, Maryland," *Public Papers, 1970*, 936; Nixon, "Remarks in Dallas, Texas," *Public Papers, 1970*, 986; Nixon, "Remarks at Rockford, Illinois," *Public Papers, 1970*, 1002; Nixon, "Remarks in Rochester, Minnesota," *Public Papers, 1970*, 1010; Nixon, "Remarks in San Jose, California," *Public Papers, 1970*, 1026; Nixon, "Remarks in Las Vegas, Nevada," *Public Papers, 1970*, 1052; Nixon, "Remarks in Salt Lake City, Utah," *Public Papers, 1970*, 1059.
- ⁵⁰ Nixon, "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1971*, 52.
- ⁵¹ Nixon, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce: 'The Right To Be Confident,'" *Public Papers, 1971*, 586.

- ⁵² The first direct mention of “want ads” occurred during a speech in Maryland: “And we found that at the same time that welfare was going up, the want ads, people asking people to come to work, were still filled in paper after paper in the major cities. Now there is something wrong about that. Nixon, “Remarks in Dundalk, Maryland,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 936. He also discussed want ads during a speech in Dallas, where the quote was pulled: “Did you know—listen to this—New York City in 1966, just 4 years ago, had 600,000 people on welfare. Four years later, New York City had 1,200,000 people on welfare—double. I will tell you what is wrong with it. The difficulty is that in that same period of time in the city of New York, the great newspapers there had want ads, pages after pages, offering work for people, and no takers.” Nixon, “Remarks in Dallas, Texas,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 986. Also see Nixon, “Remarks at Rockford, Illinois,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1002; and Nixon, “Remarks in Rochester, Minnesota,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1009.
- ⁵³ Nixon, “Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs,” *Public Papers, 1969*, 644.
- ⁵⁴ Nixon discussed welfare “penalizing work” in the Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1971,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 47; “Statement About Approval of the Family Assistance Act of 1970 by the House Ways and Means Committee,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 243; “Statement About Approval of the Welfare reform and Social Security Bill by the House Committee on Ways and Means,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 638. He attacked the idea that welfare was “more profitable” than work in his “Remarks at the 50th Anniversary Convention of the United States Jaycees in St. Louis, Missouri,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 520; “Remarks on Arrival at Burlington, Vermont,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 852; “Remarks on Arrival at Teterboro, New Jersey,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 858; “Remarks in Ocean Grove, New Jersey,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 861; “Remarks on Arrival at Lancaster, Pennsylvania,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 867; “Remarks in the Ohio State House, Columbus, Ohio,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 878; “Remarks in Dundalk, Maryland,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 932; “Remarks at Longview, Texas,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 975; “Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Children,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1122; “Address to the Congress on Stabilization of the Economy,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 938; “Remarks at a Question-and-Answer Session With a 10-Member Panel of the Economic Club of Detroit,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 965; “Remarks to the White House Conference on Aging,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1152; “Address on the State of the Union Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 52.
- ⁵⁵ Nixon, “Remarks in Uniondale, New York.” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1019-1020.
- ⁵⁶ Nixon, “Remarks at the Republican Governors Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 553.
- ⁵⁷ Nixon, “Labor Day Message,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 850-851.
- ⁵⁸ Nixon, “Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs,” *Public Papers, 1969*, 644.
- ⁵⁹ Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Legislative Reform,” *Public Papers, 1969*, 790.
- ⁶⁰ Nixon, “Annual Budget Message to the Congress,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 10; Nixon, “Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1971,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 62; Nixon, “Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Children,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1124; Nixon, “Remarks to the White House Conference on Aging,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 1154; Nixon, “Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1973,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 87; Nixon, “State of the Union Message to the Congress on Human Resources,” *Public Papers, 1973*, 140; Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 140; Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 140.
- ⁶¹ Nixon, “Remarks at the 50th Anniversary Convention of the United States Jaycees in St. Louis, Missouri.” *Public Papers, 1970*, 521; Nixon, “Remarks on Arrival at Teterboro, New Jersey,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 859; Nixon, “Remarks in Ocean Grove, New Jersey,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 864; Nixon,

“Remarks on Arrival at Lancaster, Pennsylvania,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 870; Nixon, “Remarks in the Ohio State House, Columbus, Ohio,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 880; Nixon, “Remarks in Dundalk, Maryland,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 936; Nixon, “Remarks at Longview, Texas,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 979.

⁶² Nixon, “Remarks at the Republican Governors Conference in Williamsburg, Virginia,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 554.

⁶³ Nixon, “Radio Speech, October 28, 1968,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

⁶⁴ Nixon used, and perhaps even coined, the term “welfare snoopers” during his “Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Children,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1124; and “Remarks at a Question-and-Answer Session With a 10-Member Panel of the Economic Club of Detroit,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 974.

⁶⁵ Nixon attacked the “flagrant invasions of the privacy of those on welfare” in “Radio Speech, October 28, 1968,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*. He called the welfare system “demeaning” in a large number of speeches throughout the 1968 campaign and his time in office. He mentioned that welfare robbed its recipients of their dignity in a number of speeches, including “Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs,” *Public Papers, 1969*, 639.

⁶⁶ Nixon, “Remarks at the Opening Session of the White House Conference on Children,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 1125

⁶⁷ Nixon, “University of Santa Clara speech, October 7, 1968,” in *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*. Also see “Charlotte, NC Speech, September 11, 1968,” “Denver, Colorado, Speech, September 25, 1968,” “Norfolk Rally and Panel, October 2, 1968; “Buffalo Rally speech, October 7, 1968,” “Southern Methodist University Rally, October 12, 1968,” “Johnstown Pennsylvania Rally, October 17, 1969,” as well as a national television ad, all available through the *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Nixon, “Remarks to Delegates to the 15th Biennial Convention of the National Federation of Republican Women,” *Public Papers, 1969*, 761; and Nixon, “Remarks at Longview, Texas,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 979.

⁶⁹ Nixon, “Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1972,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 85; Nixon, “Address to the Congress on Stabilization of the Economy,” *Public Papers, 1971*, 943; Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 502.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Nixon, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 52; Nixon, “Remarks on Arrival at Teterboro, New Jersey,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 859; Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform,” *Public Papers, 1972*, 501.

⁷¹ Nixon, “Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform,” *Public Papers, 1970*, 502.

⁷² Nixon, “State of the Union Message to the Congress on Human Resources,” *Public Papers, 1973*, 141.

⁷³ Nixon, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1974* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 68.

⁷⁴ Moynihan, *The Politics of Guaranteed Income: The Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan* (New York: Random House, 1973).

⁷⁵ Nixon, “Radio Speech, October 28, 1968,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

- ⁷⁶ Nixon, "Radio Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ⁷⁷ Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 644.
- ⁷⁸ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Reform of the Nation's Welfare System," *Public Papers, 1969*, 648.
- ⁷⁹ Nixon discussed the distinction between guaranteed income and the FAP in "Radio Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*, and "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers, 1969*, 644.
- ⁸⁰ Nixon used the term "workfare" when he announced the FAP on August 8, 1968, but tended not to use the term again until 1972. Then he used it often, including in the Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1972*, 52; "The Annual Budget Message to the Congress, Fiscal Year 1973," *Public Papers, 1972*, 80; and in a "Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform," *Public Papers, 1972*, 501.
- ⁸¹ Burke and Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed*, 93.
- ⁸² Burke and Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed*, 69
- ⁸³ Nixon, "Labor Day Message," *Public Papers, 1972*, 850.
- ⁸⁴ Nixon had a mixed record on training programs and the provision of public jobs. He signed a number of bills, such as the Public Service Employment Bill of 1971 and the Comprehensive Education and Training Act of 1973, but also vetoed legislation such as the extension of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965.
- ⁸⁵ Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on Welfare reform," *Public Papers, 1972*, 503.
- ⁸⁶ Nixon, "Remarks in Kansas City, Missouri," *Public Papers, 1970*, 896.
- ⁸⁷ Nixon, "Speech, Radio Speech, October 28, 1968," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ⁸⁸ Asen, "Nixon's Welfare Reform," 276.
- ⁸⁹ Burke and Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed*, 218.
- ⁹⁰ See Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 6th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1999), 340.
- ⁹¹ The NWRO was especially influential during the Senate hearings in 1970. See Burke and Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed*, 159.
- ⁹² Burke and Burke, *Nixon's Good Deed*, 93.

CHAPTER IV

JIMMY CARTER AND THE LIMITS OF GOVERNMENT

When Jimmy Carter presented his second major welfare reform proposal in May of 1979, he captured perhaps the key point of this work when he explained that “No legislative struggle in the last decade has provided so much hopeful rhetoric or so much disappointment and frustration.”¹ Carter campaigned on welfare reform in 1976, where his tag line promising to reform the “welfare mess” captured large applause throughout the campaign. Once in office, Carter formed a research team and promised comprehensive reform based on clear principles that he consistently supported. His Program for Better Jobs and Income (PBJI) was announced on August 6, 1977, but much like Nixon’s FAP, odd acronyms and all, the program languished in Congress. Despite Carter’s advantage of having a Democratic Congress with which to work, he could not overcome many of the same political barriers and policy dilemmas that doomed the FAP. In addition, Carter was not as political savvy as Johnson or Nixon, and faced a weaker economy and a public increasingly wary of the efficiency and trustworthiness of government.

Of the five presidents in the study, Carter seemed to struggle the most with the difficulty of the situation. Poverty and welfare reform was high on Carter’s domestic agenda, but, unlike Johnson and Nixon, it was not at the top. For the most part, problems with the economy, especially inflation, kept Carter preoccupied, along with the energy crisis and the Middle East. He nonetheless presented a major program to Congress for the “complete overhaul” of welfare in 1977, and then, after it failed, presented a more incremental proposal in 1979. At times he discussed the issue often, and at times it would be absent from his everyday discussions for months at a time. Overall, his rhetoric concerning welfare gives readers a sense of his feelings of disappointment for being unable to solve this issue that seemed to have so much momentum for change. At times, Carter seemed to grasp the inherent dilemmas of the situation, but he nonetheless was unable to overcome them. Carter was known as a principled Christian man who in the post-presidency continues to have a strong natural sympathy for the disadvantaged and for the issue of human rights. During his presidency, however, Carter was also generally conservative for a Democrat, especially in terms of his vision of the role of the federal government and the issues he chose to focus upon. The inconsistencies between these two impulses caused within Carter was evident in his rhetoric, as he hoped to fulfill lofty ideals but also continuously warned of the dangers of government.

In general, Carter’s rhetoric was similar to Nixon’s, although Carter was much less openly belligerent to the poor themselves and tended not to pit them against each other. Carter expressed a similar philosophy of government based on equal opportunity and full employment, with some additional degrees of specificity. Carter relied heavily on the typical unemployable / employable split evident in Nixon’s

rhetoric, and also focused more on the negative features of welfare than its benefits or even the problem of poverty itself. He also presented his own unique set of relevant characters. At certain points, however, Carter made brief comments that revealed a greater understanding of the situation and that remain curious in their opposition to much of Carter's other rhetoric. In particular were Carter's assumptions that ninety percent of individuals on welfare could not work, and the admission that most of the poor already do work. These comments worked against Carter's welfare plan, which was based around work requirements and work incentives to "force" more of the able poor into the workforce. In the end, Carter's experiences represent simply another example of the difficulty of poverty politics.

Unlike Johnson and Nixon, welfare and poverty were not major topics of discussion for Carter. Each of his proposals was accompanied by significant comments, and Carter answered a number of questions during press conferences and interviews concerning his welfare proposals, but otherwise he tended to focus his attention elsewhere. Nonetheless, this analysis of his rhetoric reveals some interesting conclusions and comparisons to the other presidents. Carter's rhetoric was unique in the sense of struggle that was evident. Nixon's welfare rhetoric certainly had its contradictions, but Nixon seemed either oblivious to them or understood their political necessity or utility. Carter seemed almost surprised at the difficulty of the issue and was at times much more open to admitting the inherent dilemmas and allowing for the need for study and debate. Such a perspective has its own advantages and disadvantages, of course. Carter was perhaps more realistic and true to the difficulty of the situation, but his lack of confidence also likely cost his programs support.

Carter's Record

Jimmy Carter entered in the White House in 1977 after eight years of Republican rule, giving the Democrats control of both houses of Congress and the White House once again. During a nationally televised address two weeks after his inauguration, he discussed the need for a "complete overhaul" of the welfare system, and announced he had put together a team to research the issue.² At a briefing on May 2, Carter provided his "goals and guidelines" for welfare reform, which called for the present system to be "scrapped entirely" and the new program to have no additional initial cost.³ Then, during a news conference on August 6, President Carter revealed his welfare reform proposal, the Program for Better Jobs and Income (PBJI).⁴ The bill was similar to Nixon's FAP in that it combined elements of a guaranteed income with work requirements. Carter sought to replace AFDC, SSI, and food stamps with a two-tier program, an upper tier for those who cannot be expected to work, and a lower tier for those that could. The initial proposal allowed for \$4,200 a year for a family of four in the top tier and \$2,300 for the lower tier, with a sliding scale of allowances for income at a fifty percent rate. All in the lower tier would

be expected to work, and mothers with children ages 7 to 14 were expected to work part time in the upper tier.

The plan was similar to Nixon's FAP, but with a greater emphasis on public service jobs and training programs for those required to work. Indeed, Carter promised 1.4 million public jobs at minimum wage. Carter admitted that the program would have a higher initial cost—breaking his earlier promise—and gave an estimate of \$30.7 billion for the new program, \$2.8 billion more than the combined cost of the programs it was replacing. This estimate later proved quite conservative, as the Congressional Budget Office offered a number that pointed toward \$17.4 billion in added costs.⁵ No significant action occurred in Congress on the legislation in 1977. Carter did, however, sign bills in related areas, including bills that increased minimum wage, eliminated the cash requirement for food stamps, and increased payroll taxes sharply in order to put social security on better financial footing.⁶

In 1978, the PBJI was unable to make its way out of the House Ways and Means or the Senate Finance Committee. According to *Congressional Quarterly*, welfare reform, similar to Carter's major proposals for health insurance, tax revision, and urban renewal, "never got off the ground."⁷ In February, a House subcommittee was able to vote out a bill consistent with Carter's proposal, but the standing committees did not take it further. In the spring, Congress acted on some of the less controversial parts of the bill, including fiscal relief for state and local government, simplifying administration, expanding EITC, and adding more public service jobs. These actions represented yet another of the difficulties of passing comprehensive welfare reform. Congress will tend to break off the less difficult aspects of reform and pass them individually, leaving the more difficult issues with fewer supporters. By June, House Speaker Tip O'Neil called for an end to the efforts to hammer out a compromise bill between the committees. Carter did sign the mostly symbolic Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act in 1978. The bill expressed a "goal" of reducing unemployment to four percent by 1983, but provided little to make that happen. In the words of social welfare scholar Walter Trattner, the bill was "diluted and relatively meaningless."⁸ Carter was criticized by some of his Democratic allies for not supporting the bill more strongly, and the bill was eventually passed only after "swallowing changes that they had previously considered unacceptable."⁹

In the 1978 elections, the Democrats lost members in both Houses, but nonetheless maintained their dual majority in Congress. In 1979, with the PBJI effectively dead, Carter retreated, offering a scaled down version of welfare reform through two proposals announced on May 23, the Social Welfare Reform Amendments of 1979 and the Work and Training Opportunities Act of 1979.¹⁰ The plans retained the same AFDC structure, but established national minimums to alleviate some of the geographic inequality in benefits, required states to allow two parent families if unemployed, and offered states some fiscal relief. The House passed the reforms in November, but the Senate did not act.

By 1980, the presidential campaign was in full swing, and comprehensive reform seemed unlikely. Carter focused primarily on the energy crisis and the double-digit inflation. Carter's latest

welfare reform package died quietly, and was never even considered by the Senate Finance Committee. With the Congress intent on trying to balance the budget, the high cost of welfare reform was too high a barrier to overcome. Carter's newest social initiative, a major youth employment bill, passed the House by a wide margin, but never came to the Senate floor. For the second year in a row, Congress had to act to prevent the shutdown of the Food Stamp program, whose costs had grown in size from \$31 million in 1964 to \$5 billion in 1977.

In the end, Carter, like Nixon was unable to pass significant welfare reform despite, as his rhetoric will attest, Carter's significant displeasure with the current system. By the end of the 1970s, \$68 million was being spent on welfare annually, an average of \$2,750 per individual in poverty. Twenty-five million Americans were living in poverty, which translated into eleven percent of the population. Without the income transfers coming from the government's various programs, that number would have been sixteen percent.¹¹

Carter and the Role of Government

Jimmy Carter's rhetoric concerning his philosophy of government and the ideal he held for American society included an element that was rather new to American politics: restraint. Coming off of Vietnam, the Watergate scandal, a decade of racial strife, and with a shaky economy, the American mood was rather somber in the middle 1970s. Fitting with this mood, Carter did not seem to exude the same confidence as his predecessors. The notion of the limits of government and the difficulty of progress was a primary feature of his rhetoric. Nonetheless, he continued to cite lofty goals and ideals for American society, with government playing an important role in achieving those goals. This tension between goals and limits was often manifested specifically within the issue of welfare reform.

From the very beginning of his presidency Carter cited the importance of understanding limitations. In his inaugural address, typically a time of celebration and optimism, especially with a change of parties, Carter nonetheless explained, "We have learned that more is not necessarily better, that even our great Nation has its recognized limits, and that we can neither answer all questions nor solve all problems. We cannot afford to do everything, nor can we afford to lack boldness as we meet the future. So, together, in a spirit of individual sacrifice for the common good, we must simply do our best."¹² Two weeks later during a nationally broadcast address outlining his legislative goals, Carter made sure expectations would not be too high, admitting that "[a]s President, I will not be able to provide everything that every one of you might like. I am sure to make many mistakes."¹³ These statements are not monumental, but they did begin the Carter presidency with a sense of caution and revealed a little about the man in the White House, especially compared to Johnson's proclamations of ending poverty and creating a "Great Society."

Throughout his presidency, Carter continued along similar lines, especially in nationally televised addresses. During his 1978 State of the Union, for example, he once again focused on the limits of government:

As President, I've had to ask you, the Members of Congress, and you, the American people, to come to grips with some of the most difficult and hard questions facing our society. We must make a maximum effort, because if we do not aim for the best, we are very likely to achieve little. I see no benefit to the country if we delay, because the problems will only get worse. We need patience and good will, but we really need to realize that there is a limit to the role and the function of government. Government cannot solve our problems, it can't set our goals, it cannot define our vision. Government cannot eliminate poverty or provide a bountiful economy or reduce inflation or save our cities or cure illiteracy or provide energy. And government cannot mandate goodness. Only a true partnership between government and the people can ever hope to reach these goals. Those of us who govern can sometimes inspire, and we can identify needs and marshal resources, but we simply cannot be the managers of everything and everybody.¹⁴

During his 1979 State of the Union, Carter once again discussed the difficulty of the problems the nation faced and the corresponding insufficiency of government: "the problems that we face today are different from those that confronted earlier generations of Americans. They are more subtle, more complex, and more interrelated. At home, we are recognizing ever more clearly that government alone cannot solve these problems."¹⁵ Of course, the most well known example of Carter's constrained style was his infamous "Crisis of Confidence" speech delivered on national television on July 15, 1979.¹⁶ Into the 1980 campaign, Carter even attempted to use his restraint as a campaign issue as he differentiated himself from Reagan. During his nomination acceptance address, for example, he explained how his experience in office helped him understand that difficulty of the job: "Let me talk for a moment about what that job is like and what I've learned from it. I've learned that only the most complex and difficult task comes before me in the Oval Office. No easy answers are found there, because no easy questions come there. The only way to build a better future is to start with the realities of the present. But while we Democrats grapple with the real challenges of a real world, others talk about a world of tinsel and make-believe."¹⁷

Despite the sense of limits Carter often provided, he nonetheless expressed some lofty ideals. Perhaps the most relevant ideal Carter expressed was that of full employment. Both Johnson and Nixon supported the need for full employment and equal opportunity, but Carter went a bit further in expressing the ideal in more specific terms. Oddly, however, Carter was also criticized for not strongly supporting the more substantive aspects of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment bill.¹⁸ He did offer rhetorical support for the bill's ideals, but evidently did not push strongly for the bill's specific measures.

Nonetheless, the notion that a job should be available to all able-bodied Americans, and that job should be sufficient to lift that individual's family out of poverty was an interesting component of Carter's philosophy. During a television interview in July of 1977, Carter proclaimed the goal "that every family in the United States, that at least one member of that family will have a job, either in private life or a public job that pays a wage adequate to finance that family."¹⁹ A week later, the goal had elevated to the point of being a "guarantee": "Our goal is to make sure that every single family has a member of it with a guaranteed job, by government if necessary, and this is a goal that we intend to reach."²⁰ In response to a question concerning the Humphrey-Hawkins bill, Carter answered that he believed "every person in our country that's able to work ought to have an opportunity for a job."²¹ During the 1978 State of the Union, he labeled a "job opportunity" and the "chance to earn a decent living" as a "basic human right, which we cannot and will not ignore."²² In later speeches he added that "[m]eaningful job opportunities ought to be available for all Americans who wish to work" and hoped to "ensure that, for every family containing children and parents who want to work, there will be a job," thus "[m]ost families containing an employable person will see their income rise substantially above the poverty line."²³

Carter's welfare reform proposal was a critical vehicle in his hopes to fulfill this goal. During the announcement of the PBJI, Carter promised that under the plan "every family with a full-time worker will have an income substantially above the poverty line for the first time."²⁴ Later in the year, he explained that one of the major elements of the legislation was "ensuring that every family with a working adult would have a total income above the poverty line."²⁵ Overall, Carter's word choices throughout these statements are interesting to consider. They ranged from a "guarantee" and a "basic right" to a job, to the considerably less firm notion that individual "ought" to have an "opportunity" for a job. At times the job was unspecified, at others Carter hoped for an "adequate wage," and in still others he promised wages above or "substantially above" the poverty line. The PBJI, with its sliding scale of benefits to the working poor and its expansion of the EITC, would have improved the income of full-time workers, although whether those incomes would be considered substantially above the poverty line was questionable. Thus, while Carter's rhetoric remained somewhat unclear on the subject, he did with these comments question the common assumption that any work on its own would be sufficient.

Also relevant to Carter's philosophy of government was his call for government to be "competent and compassionate," a typical tagline in his 1976 campaign speeches that was repeated during his inaugural address. Accompanying them as key terms of Carter's in describing government was efficient and effective, which actually seemed to replace competent and compassionate by the 1980 campaign.²⁶ One of Carter's clearest expositions of his philosophy of government was in response to a question concerning a comment he had made earlier about being more similar to John F. Kennedy than Ted Kennedy, his opponent, was: "Well, philosophically, I think so. I don't believe that the Federal Government ought to do everything. I don't believe in establishing a whole big array of massive Federal

Government spending programs to take care of the needs of our country. I believe in tight management; I believe in making the existing programs efficient. I believe in saving money; I believe in trying to have fiscal responsibility in managing the budget; and another, I believe that John Kennedy would have agreed with all those things."²⁷ Carter's use of terms such as competence and efficiency fit within his broader points about the limits of government. He sought, in other words, to improve and reform, rather than revolutionize.

Carter's Depiction of the Poor

Carter presented an interesting cast of characters when discussing welfare and poverty issues. He primarily relied on the distinction between welfare recipients that "can work" and those that could not. From this base, however, Carter also presented a variety of both positive and negative depictions. Carter would tend to focus on a certain character for an extended period of time, and then move on to another. Thus, unlike Johnson's hard-core unemployed or Nixon's welfare loafers, Carter's representative character changed during his administration. Early in the campaign of 1976, Carter focused on welfare recipients. Toward the end of the campaign and into his presidency, his focus switched to the newly unemployed head of household, an image for which he offered significant sympathy. Later in his term, Carter began to focus more and more on the "disadvantaged," especially minority youth, which were framed positively but were unlikely to garner much sympathy from the general public.

From the beginning, it was clear that Carter relied heavily on the can work / cannot work division of the poor, particularly as applied to those receiving welfare. Throughout the campaign of 1976, Carter attacked the welfare system in part because it treated the two different groups similarly. Similar to both Johnson and Nixon, Carter sought to redefine the purpose of welfare for those that could work from a program that sustains life into one that lead to self-sufficiency. Unlike both Johnson and Nixon, however, Carter actually specified what percentage of welfare recipients could work and not work. A Carter advertisement during the 1976 campaign, for example, included the following passage:

We've now got 12 million people on welfare chronically. First of all we need to separate that 10 percent of welfare recipients who can work completely out of the welfare program and put them under the Labor Department, Education Department, teach them how to work, give them job training, match them with a job and offer it to them. If they don't take it, when it's offered to them, I wouldn't pay them any more benefits.

Carter cited the 90/10 split on a number of occasions during the campaign.²⁸ The number itself was an interesting one. Carter seemed to present the number of able welfare poor as if it was unexpectedly high, although I imagine most Americans at that time would have likely estimated the number much higher than ten percent. Nixon relied on a similar split of unemployables and the idle welfare poor, but, if his rhetoric

is any indication, he certainly focused to a much greater extent on the idle welfare poor as if they were the majority, not a small minority of those on welfare.

For each of these two categories, Carter offered different programs and different rhetorical treatment. For the unable to work, which included the aged, disabled, and mothers of young children, Carter called for understanding, fairness, concern, compassion, respect, love, attention, fairness, and dignity.²⁹ He attacked both the low level and the lack of uniformity in their benefits. Carter's sympathy for these unemployables was presented in comparison to his wary preoccupation for their counterparts, able-bodied welfare recipients. During a question and answer session in February of 1977, for example, Carter stressed the importance of making the distinction clear:

This was one of my major themes during my campaign. Let me say this: About 90 percent of the people on welfare cannot work. The other 10 percent can work. I am perfectly willing to give humane and adequate aid to those who are not able to work. I am not willing to support those who are able to work and won't. *The separation of that will be a major thrust of my government* [emphasis added].³⁰

Carter discussed the split often during the campaign and when introducing the PBJI in 1977, but by 1978, the unable to work were rarely mentioned by Carter anymore, despite the fact that they supposedly represented 90 percent of the welfare poor.

Carter's depiction of the "can work" was rather unclear. He tended to bounce back and forth between positive and negative attributions. The key point was certainly the need to have the able-bodied working, what was unclear was the barrier to this goal, whether it was lack of motivation, lack of opportunity, or simply the perverse incentives of welfare. Carter's rhetoric would tend to alternate between the three. In the excerpt quoted above, Carter seemed rather unsympathetic (he was "not willing" to support them). At times, he would use negative terms such as "cheaters," or, using rhetoric very similar to Nixon, would explain that if the able welfare poor were taught, given training, matched with a job, and offered a job, and then do not accept the job, they would be "cut off" from benefits. Such statements, which came in various similar forms, tended to give the impression that at least some of the ideal poor would choose to avoid work.³¹

Oddly enough, the most derogatory Carter ever was toward the poor was primarily through passive acceptance of some highly stereotypical comments by questioners. During a town hall meeting on July 31, 1979, for example, a citizen asked Carter, "Yesterday morning I heard on the news there were over 6,000 illegitimate children born last year alone. As a taxpayer, I would like to know if there would be job openings for mothers after the first child whereas the taxpayer would not have to support them, buy them homes I mean, you know, help give them homes and steaks and cars to ride around in." Carter not only did not flinch at the wording of the question, but he actually commended the questioner, saying:

I think your question's a very good one, and this is what we're trying to do, to give people who really need welfare payments and who cannot work an opportunity to live a decent life, to provide mothers who want to work a chance to keep their children in a good day care center and get jobs. And people who are able-bodied and don't have children, I don't believe in any welfare payments for them. I think they ought to go to work.³²

A similar exchange occurred during a session in Oklahoma in 1979.³³

Elsewhere, Carter placed the responsibility on the lack of true opportunity or on the welfare system itself, following Nixon in continually labeling the system as “anti-work.” At times, “ought to work” was replaced with “ought to have a chance to work.”³⁴ Carter defended the work ethic of the poor at times, explaining that they “want to work,” “prefer work to welfare,” and “would rather work if given the opportunity.”³⁵ Later, he defended the PBJI in part because it “recognizes that this is a Nation of men and women who do not wish to be wards of the Government but who want to work and to be self-sufficient.”³⁶

Carter’s was the most sympathetic with the poor during the campaign of 1976, at least in part because recent increases in unemployment were used by the campaign to attack Ford. In a series of speeches in October of 1976, Carter presented an image of the newly unemployed head of household forced to take welfare after a lifetime of work, in part due to Republican policies. In his nomination acceptance address, for example, Carter presented a dissociation between the rich and poor, explaining how the rich are unable to understand the struggles of the poor.³⁷ Throughout the remainder of the campaign, Carter continued to tell hypothetical stories that focused on the difficulties faced by the newly unemployed. For example, in a speech in Dallas Carter asked the crowd to do some role-playing in order to identify more closely with the poor:

Think about a father proud like you are, competent like you are, self-reliant like you are. The head of a household--like many of you, or a mother, eager to work--can't find a job. They come home at night, face the children with the authority and the responsibility and the respect that should go to the breadwinner stripped away. Put yourself in that position. Think of going down and drawing your first welfare check. When you've worked all your life. It tears a family apart. It destroys their self-respect; it eliminates basic human dignity. And in this last two years, two and a half million more Americans have had to accept that circumstance.³⁸

A week later, he asked the Republicans to role play, asking if they considered what it was like “to be men or women who are laid off, and can't find work, and can't provide for their children, and have to go stand in an unemployment line or a welfare line after a lifetime of honest and satisfying work?”³⁹ Often he would focus on the knowledge gap between the poor and the non-poor, as he did in Los Angeles on October 7th: “We in this room, almost without exception, don't have to worry about unemployment in our

own families. We don't know what it means to be out of a job. Having worked fifteen or twenty years, and all of a sudden drawing unemployment compensation for six months or a little longer. And then going home and having to cash the first welfare check.”⁴⁰ Similar comments were made during campaign speeches in Indianapolis, South Bend, and New York.⁴¹

These stories all presented external attributions for poverty and welfare, tended to focus on the inherent similarities between the poor and nonpoor, and in particular the difficulties faced by the poor. By having the individuals in the examples newly unemployed, Carter was more likely to provide the sense that something similar could happen to those listening. Depicting them as hard-working individuals responsible for a family also increased the natural sympathy others would hold for them. Once the election was over, however, Carter did not offer such narratives again. Similar to Nixon, therefore, Carter's attribution of able-bodied welfare recipients alternated between positive and negative frames. Once again, however, if that lack of clarity is considered in the context of the public's pre-existing negative stereotype of welfare recipients, Carter's rhetoric clearly did not challenge those stereotypes and likely contributed to their solidification.

Carter generally focused on the can work/cannot work split among welfare recipients when discussing issues of poverty, but during one conversation in May of 1979, he provided a significant revelation that muddied the water somewhat concerning that simple distinction:

The present system provides insufficient opportunities for families to move off cash assistance and into productive jobs. The great majority of family heads receiving cash assistance want to work. Most of the poor who are able to work do in fact work, but usually in low paying and sporadic jobs. In 1977, more than three-fifths of the 3.8 million families with children with incomes below the official poverty line had either a part-time or a full-time worker. Over a million of these families were headed by women, most of whom supplemented their meager earnings with welfare. Yet, only one-fifth of these working poor families had a worker who was able to find a full-time, year round job. In addition, almost three million other families with children live close to the poverty line despite the efforts of one or more family workers.⁴²

With the recitation of these facts, Carter seemed to undermine his own proposal. He had argued that 90 percent of the welfare poor could not work and 10 percent could work but did not. His welfare reform was focused on improving the care of the former and either “forcing” or “encouraging” the latter to work. Now Carter was explaining that most of the poor actually did work, but that work was not sufficient. Of course, the total number of those under the poverty line is much larger than the number receiving welfare, so the percentages do not directly compare, but nonetheless these statistics seem to point to a different problem—the insufficiency of work—rather than the perverse incentives of welfare.

Two additional characters within Carter's welfare rhetoric are relevant. First, was the manner in which he tended to use "family" as his basic unit rather than "man" or "individual." He was dismayed over the number of "families" falling into unemployment, impressed with the work ethic of the "family," and sold the PBJI in part due to the number "families" it would lift out of poverty. His ideal was that every family would have a full time worker with a job that provided sufficient income. He explained in his inaugural address that strengthening the American family was the "basis of our society," and held a White House Conference on Families.⁴³ Family has always been an inherently positive word in American politics, and Carter relied on it rather heavily throughout his presidency.

The last categorization of the poor provided by Carter was most prevalent during the latter part of his tenure. Starting early in 1978 and continuing throughout 1979 and 1980, the group Carter seemed to discuss most often was disadvantaged youth, especially minority youth. Carter frequently cited figures concerning unemployment among youth, with the minority figures specified separately, and called for a number of programs to treat the problem. He explained how the economic recovery had left this segment of the American people behind, and sought to redirect efforts to them and others that were considered the "most disadvantaged." Interestingly, Carter's change of focus from the 1976 campaign (the newly unemployed head of household) to the second half of his term (minority youth) represented practically a 180 degree turn in terms of garnering the potential sympathy of the common American. Although youth unemployment may have been an important problem, it likely did not register too highly on the public agenda. These youth were essentially within a period of time where they were too old to be considered deserving children, and too young to be considered the deserving working poor. Similar to when Johnson focused on the hard-core unemployed, Carter's focus on minority youth likely worked against anti-poverty programs overall by making a less sympathetic figure the face of poverty. Nonetheless, these youth clearly became a focal point of Carter's during these years, both rhetorically and legislatively. It represents another aspect of the deserving-undeserving tension in that the most in need of help are likely to be the most difficult for which to find support.

In summary, the cast of characters within Carter's rhetoric primarily fit within the norm in terms of relying on the typical can work/cannot work distinction, as well as its dual presentation of dispositional and environmental attributions for the able-bodied receipt of welfare. However, Carter also seemed to question that simple distinction when he presented statistics concerning the number of poor that work yet remained below the poverty line. Rather than have one representative character, Carter seemed to shift his characters chronologically. Carter painted a very sympathetic picture of the newly unemployed head of household thrust into poverty and welfare due to external factors during the 1976 campaign. While presenting this image, Carter also offered interesting arguments concerning the realities of poverty and the difficulty of the non-poor to understand the struggles of the poor. These stories, however, did not reappear once the election was over. Welfare reform, and the can work/can't work split dominated during the early

part of his presidency. Once welfare reform was effectively dropped, Carter began to focus on disadvantaged youth. He was able to pass some legislation to provide work and training for these youth, but he also likely de-emphasized the importance of the issues he discussed during the first half of his presidency, such as the problem of the welfare system and the plight of the newly unemployed.

Carter's Anti-Welfare Rhetoric

Despite his Democratic party affiliation, Jimmy Carter followed Richard Nixon in presenting a significant attack on the welfare system, although he did not disparage its recipients nearly as much as Nixon. Considering Carter's overall rhetoric, it is clear that the issue of poverty had been eclipsed by welfare in American politics and the War on Poverty had shifted into the War on Welfare. Carter utilized an attack on welfare as a primary campaign issue, and offered a similar laundry list of problems with the welfare system throughout his presidency. Overall, Carter offered a three-pronged attack on the welfare system. The primary charge was that it was irrational and overly complex, which led to problems of inefficiency, waste, fraud, abuse, and inequality. The second and third charges matched Nixon's basic criticisms of the system being both anti-work and anti-family.

Considering his philosophical rhetoric regarding the need for efficiency and effectiveness, Carter's displeasure for the welfare system was not surprising. Again and again, Carter used terms such as irrational, incoherent, overly complex, confused, and overlapping to describe the system. It was a "hodgepodge" of programs, and a "crazy quilt-patchwork stitched together over decades."⁴⁴ This complexity led to a number of other problems, including waste, redtape, abuse, and "almost inevitable fraud."⁴⁵ Carter was especially vexed with the manner in which the program treated similar people differently and different people similarly.⁴⁶ The important issue to consider here is that Carter was placing the blame for many of the problems of welfare on the system, not on its recipients, administrators, or anything outside the system. In fact, everyone was a victim of the system that "robs the taxpayers who support it, discourages the people who administer it, and sometimes degrades the people who really do need help."⁴⁷

The second major problem with welfare was its propensity to discourage work. Work and welfare were once again pitted against each other as if they were mutually exclusive. Most often, Carter would simply label the system as "anti-work."⁴⁸ During his August 6, 1977, press conference and his message to Congress the same day, Carter provided specific numbers that revealed the disincentive to work.⁴⁹

The third prong of Carter's attack was that the welfare system was anti-family, a point he tended to make in every speech that welfare was mentioned, and was often combined with the anti-work argument.⁵⁰ The welfare system "forced" or "encouraged" fathers to leave home by "providing incentives

for family breakup.”⁵¹ Homes were being divided by “silly rules.”⁵² In his news briefing on May 2, 1977, Carter actually walked those gathered through an example of how welfare was anti-work and anti-family:

For instance, a father who heads up a family with four people in it, either a mother and two children or three children, in Michigan, working full time at the minimum wage, has a total income of \$5,678. A same-sized family without the father in the home with still four people there, not working at all, has an income of \$7,161. A family with the head of the household—a mother and three children—if she goes to work at the minimum wage, has a total income of \$9,530. This shows that the best thing that a working father can do to increase the income of the people that he loves is simply to leave home.⁵³

During the announcement of the PBJI, Carter provided another specific example.⁵⁴ Similar to welfare’s violation of Carter’s overall focus on efficiency, therefore, welfare also violated Carter’s emphasis of protecting and improving the American family.

In summary, Carter provided a similar attack on welfare, albeit with less details than Nixon. The importance of this attack is not only that Carter, a Democrat, accepted all the perverse incentives that were such an important part of Nixon’s rhetoric, but also that Carter defined the primary problem as the welfare system and its perverse incentives, even though by his own admission these incentives only influenced a possible ten percent of those receiving welfare. In brief moments, often in response to questions, Carter admitted to the lack of availability and sufficiency of full time work, but in general his rhetoric focused on the issue of welfare, not poverty or inequality.

Carter and the Program for Better Jobs and Income

Considering Carter’s ideals and his attack on the welfare system, the structure of his own program is rather straightforward and expected. First, Carter clearly rejected incremental reform. In the campaign and early in his administration, he emphasized the need for a “complete overhaul.” “Tinkering” or “minor modifications” would not be enough, the program had to be “thoroughly redesigned,” “scrapped entirely,” and be a “complete and clean break.”⁵⁵ His program was designed primarily to fix the three major flaws with the current system: its complexity and its anti-work and anti-family effects. PBJI’s two-tiered program applied directly to Carter’s split between the can work and cannot work, although it did include the working poor along with the able-bodied welfare poor, a feature which significantly increase the cost. By ending AFDC, with all the various rules it had accrued since 1934, along with the food stamp and SSI, and replacing them with one program with more universal application, Carter hoped to simplify administration and therefore better control waste, fraud, and abuse. By having the program apply to all families, not just single mothers, Carter hoped to counteract the anti-family aspects of the previous program. And by including the working poor within the program, instilling work requirements, a sliding

scale for income, 1.4 million public service jobs, and expanding the EITC, Carter hoped to eliminate the disincentive to work. In Carter's words, the program would "transform the manner in which the Federal government deals with the income needs of the poor, and begin to break the welfare cycle."⁵⁶

Although Carter hoped to simplify the welfare system, he was also aware of welfare's inherent dilemmas. During a session with the state legislature of Illinois, for example, he explained that:

The welfare system is condemned from almost every vantage point, but it's almost impossible to hammer out a welfare system that gives needy people an adequate income to preserve their human dignity and at the same time can be a constant inducement for those who are able to work to go to work.⁵⁷

Carter also seemed aware of the peculiar rhetorical dynamics of welfare and poverty. During his August 6 press conference, Carter was asked if he deliberately avoided the term "welfare" in his presentation due to its negative connotation. He answered:

Yes, I think there's a great deal of stigma attached to the word "welfare." And I can't shape the vocabulary of the Nation, obviously, but we've decided to call this program, during its work phase, a Program for Better Jobs and Income. And this is what we are trying to do. I think the people of the country, according to my own interaction with them during the campaign and as President-and also my information derived from public opinion polls is that they don't like the word "welfare," but they do favor the programs that are provided for poor people, both those who work and those who cannot work.⁵⁸

Nonetheless, during the presidential campaign, Carter had clearly established welfare as the issue, not poverty, jobs, or lack of income, and opponents of his program were certainly going to work to label Carter's program as an expansion of welfare.⁵⁹

After his committee had studied the problem and reported back to him, Carter admitted the system was "much worse than we anticipated."⁶⁰ It presented an "extraordinarily complex and difficult problem, even more so than [Carter] had expected."⁶¹ The theme of the difficulty of the problem and the need for debate rather than decisive action would grow more and more important as the legislation attempted to make its way through Congress.⁶² In October of 1977, just two months after sending the program to Congress, Carter told reporters at a news conference that it may take "3 or 4 more years to reach a final conclusion on welfare reform." Moving away from the need for a complete overall, Carter explained:

I think it's better to get it on the table, have an open debate, let the people be involved in it, let the Congress start learning about it, let me learn more about it, let the private sector of our country become involved in the debate, the universities, the economists, the business leaders, the labor leaders. And I don't see anything wrong with it or anything that I would have done differently. The fact that the easy solutions have not come

forward immediately don't concern me, because they are not questions that can be resolved easily. But I think that in the long run, certainly in retrospect after this year goes by, there will be a general realization that none of these questions should have been delayed.⁶³

To review, Carter had promised a major overhaul during the 1976 campaign, promised no initial cost once he was elected, admitted to an increased cost when announcing the program, and then two months later was comfortable that the debate may last three or four years.

From August of 1977 when Carter announced the PBJI on through 1978, Carter periodically mentioned welfare reform, but certainly not with much prominence. In 1978, Congress passed some of the more popular aspects of Carter's plan, leaving the plan as a whole with much less support. With the PBJI shelved, Carter introduced two additional programs in April of 1979: the Social Welfare Reform Amendments of 1979 and the Work and Training Opportunities Act of 1979. These programs moved away from the comprehensive reform and large price tag, but still attempted to alleviate some of Carter's primary issues with welfare by providing 620,000 jobs and training slots, adding work requirements, and simplifying administration. Once again, Carter did not elevate the program to a prominent place on his agenda, and while they passed the House, they never progressed significantly in the Senate.

Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Poverty

President Carter's attempt at welfare reform in many ways mirrored Nixon's. Their goals were similar, their plans were similar, their focus on and criticisms of the welfare system were similar, and eventually the fates of their proposals were similar. The PBJI experience adds even more evidence to the notion that significant reform would be difficult in this area. Carter seemed to have some significant advantages to achieving reform. He had a Democratic Congress with which to work. The need for welfare reform seemed to fit well within Carter's ideology, especially in terms of the need to improve its efficiency, its affect on family, and its relationship to the goal of full employment. As a more conservative Democrat, Carter would perhaps be more likely to be able to understand some of the inherent dilemmas within welfare reform, rather than simply avoid or ignore them. Unfortunately, Carter's reform never really seemed to have a chance, as his agenda was continuously filled with other issues, and the same political constraints that stopped the FAP stopped the PBJI.

Equality versus Freedom

The equality versus freedom dilemma was not especially prominent during the Carter years. Carter did not attack the welfare system in terms of the dependency (or lose of freedom) that it caused, and

while he did discuss inequality in racial terms, it was not typically framed economically. Like both Johnson and Nixon before him, Carter endorsed the ideal of full employment as the primary vehicle to negotiate the equality-freedom dilemma. In expressing that ideal, Carter ventured beyond his predecessors in clearly expressing the goal that every family with a full time wage earner should be comfortably above the poverty line. Of course, Carter would at times frame this ideal in language that allowed significant leeway in application (“every American able to work *ought* to have an *opportunity* to work”⁶⁴). In addition, while he expressed the ideal more specifically than before, he did not press on the degree to which the nation was falling short of that ideal, both in terms in the continued existence of unemployment, and the continued insufficiency of employment. Carter’s welfare reform plan had some provisions to help in this area, but those provisions were not one of the selling points most often expressed by Carter. In other words, while Carter endorsed the ideal, he did not press its realization, and thus the dilemma never fully came to the surface.

Deserving versus Undeserving

For the most part, Carter’s depiction of the poor was typical. Carter’s primary distinction between the can work and the cannot work followed the norm at least since the days of Roosevelt. His clear defense of the “cannot work” and ambiguous presentation of the able-bodied welfare poor was also typical. Carter certainly did not attack the “idle welfare poor” or pit them against each other to the degree Nixon did, but neither did he spend significant time defending or rehabilitating their image. Even though Carter’s program would have essentially transformed all the able-bodied poor into the working poor, Carter rarely discussed the working poor. For the most part, Carter focused on the welfare system itself, rather than the people.

Where Carter did stray from the norm was in presenting his two secondary images of poverty, the newly unemployed head of household and the disadvantaged minority youth. The former, a focus during the 1976 campaign, was a highly sympathetic image. Carter’s depiction was practically textbook in terms of developing sympathy. The main character in his stories was typically a father with the responsibility of children, who had worked all his life until recent economic woes had thrown him out of work and forced him to unemployment and later welfare. Such a story could certainly resonate with many Americans who found themselves living paycheck to paycheck in difficult economic times. It certainly offered a different image of the welfare recipient. This image, however, was not used by Carter once the election was over. Its abandonment may serve as evidence of the difficulty of sitting presidents relying on such rather somber images of poverty and unemployment. They may be useful as attacks by candidates on incumbents, but once in office such images go against the optimism that tends to be rewarded so highly in American politics.

Carter's other secondary character, on the other hand, was unlikely to attract much sympathy. The image of the unemployed minority youth was prominent during the latter half of his presidency. It is unclear why Carter chose to place so much emphasis on this figure, beyond the obvious point that the unemployment rate for minority youth was much higher than for youth in general, and the rates for youth were higher than the rates overall. Unfortunately, teenage youth are unlikely to be considering deserving, thus Carter's continued focus on them during 1979 and 1980 was likely counterproductive to his social agenda overall.

Interestingly, the failure of the PBJI, similar to that of the FAP, represented another failed opportunity in redefining the dynamics of the deserving-undeserving line. If enacted, the two-tiered program would have worked to transform all able-bodied welfare recipients into the working poor, and thus would have made them more sympathetic figures to the public and thus more politically influential. Once again, Carter relied on some negative images of the idle welfare poor in order to build support for reform, then once the reform fell apart, the negative images were merely strengthened.

Help versus Hinder

By the time his special committee had reported to him and Carter was ready to introduce the PBJI, it was clear that he had been educated on welfare's difficult dilemmas. He took on one dilemma straight on when he admitted that in order to resolve the problem of welfare being potentially more profitable than low-wage labor, his plan would be more expensive than the status quo. Carter also openly admitted the difficulty of designing a program that provides to the needy in a sufficient and dignified manner without attracting others.

Overall, Carter seemed to understand both the advantages and disadvantages of welfare. On one hand, Carter clearly attacked the counterproductive nature of welfare programs in his rhetoric, and his plan was specifically designed to alleviate some of those effects. On the other hand, he was also aware of the need for welfare, and how it provided important benefits to those that could not work. His plan was also designed to improve the delivery of those benefits. Carter realized that the welfare system was not the proper vehicle to provide help to the able-bodied, and hoped to restructure the nation's programs for those individuals.

In the end, therefore, Carter did provide a rather prudent response to the help versus hinder dilemma in his proposal and his rhetoric. Where Carter fell short, however, was the extent to which he educated the public on these dilemmas. The rhetoric discussing these issues was often in press conferences in response to specific questions or in written messages to Congress. With Carter's agenda dominated by other issues, he never directly appealed to the American people with a consistent message to sell his

proposal and the overall redefinition of welfare for the able-bodied as well as financial assistance for the working poor.

Politics versus Policy

Once again, the politics versus policy dilemma likely led to the downfall of the PBJI. Although some of the dynamics had changed from the FAP, Carter's program nonetheless fell into the same trap of attracting criticism and opposition from both sides of the political spectrum. Conservatives balked at the price tag and the perception that the program would greatly increase the number of Americans "on the welfare rolls." Liberals again were unimpressed with the level of benefits and the work requirements. Part of the simplification of the program involved a leveling of unequal benefits received in different parts of the country. This meant that once again welfare recipients in the northern cities would receive little or no benefit from the legislation, while those in the south would receive significant increases. The welfare rights organizations were not as active as they were during the Nixon era, but nonetheless the politicians in the northern cities would have difficulty supporting an expensive program that on balance transferred benefits away from their constituents. Labor unions were again wary of the program, even more so due to the millions of public jobs Carter had promised. Turf battles between the Department of Labor, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and the Department of Agriculture also complicated matters.⁶⁵

The politics versus policy dilemma also likely kept Carter from pressing the program further. The implementation of the program was originally set for 1981 in order for Carter to meet a target for a balanced budget. Continued economic problems, especially inflation, also worked against Carter's support of the program due to its expense. Welfare reform provided a useful issue for Carter during the 1976 campaign, primarily because the dilemmas within welfare reform make it a very easy target to criticize from the outside. Once in office, however, those same dilemmas worked against Carter's program and hindered progress.

The failure of Carter's welfare reform provided further evidence of the difficulty of progress in this area. Following Johnson and Nixon, Carter was the third president in a sixteen year period that expressed significant dissatisfaction with the welfare system but was unable to change its mechanisms significantly. The combined failures of both the FAP and the PBJI were particularly disheartening. Both plans had significant merit. Both Nixon and Carter expressed an ideal of full employment that should have received strong public support, and their programs attempted to work toward that ideal. Both Nixon and Carter understood that overcoming the work disincentive to welfare would require additional spending in order to increase the relative value of low-wage labor. Both Nixon and Carter understood that instilling work requirements would also necessitate increases in job training and job creation, although Carter's plan

certainly allowed more funds for such programs. Both Nixon and Carter proposed programs that would have significantly affected the public perception of those that received public assistance because the typical deserving-undeserving split would have been less relevant as all the able-bodied would have been required to work.

The comparison of Nixon's and Carter's rhetoric to that of Johnson's also reveals the extent to which welfare had come to dominate over the issue of poverty. By the end of the 1970s, the War on Poverty was a distant memory. The public image of poverty was increasingly a negative one tied to a hated welfare system, despite Carter's own admission that only ten percent of welfare's recipients could work, and that a high percentage of those in poverty due actually work in jobs insufficient for them to escape poverty. AFDC, the program most identified with "welfare," had grown considerably, but nonetheless was only a small part of the government's overall efforts. Much of the money spent on social programs were still going to the non-poor through programs such as Medicare, but nonetheless the public antipathy was clearly focused on "welfare." More and more, the welfare system came to symbolize the failure of an increasingly unpopular government. Year after year of intense presidential criticism followed by congressional inaction certainly did not help. As the economy worsened and inflation and taxes increased, the American middle class grew more and more impatient with a program that was perceived as violating many of America's cherished values, especially freedom, equality, work, and family, while rewarding the undeserving. Within this environment, Ronald Reagan would find fertile ground for his anti-government message.

Notes

¹ Carter, "Welfare reform Legislation: Message to the Congress on the Proposed Legislation," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1979* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1980), 940.

² Carter, "Report to the American People: Remarks from the White House Library," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1977* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 74.

³ Carter, "Welfare reform: Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines," *Public Papers, 1977*, 770-775.

⁴ Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1443.

⁵ Linda D. Demkovich, "The Numbers are the Issue in the Debate over Welfare Reform," *National Journal*, April 22, 1978, 633.

⁶ See *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1977* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1978).

⁷ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1978* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1979), 9.

⁸ Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 6th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 355.

- ⁹ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1978*, 17.
- ¹⁰ Carter, "Welfare Reform Legislation: Message to the Congress on the Proposed Legislation," *Public Papers, 1979*, 938.
- ¹¹ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1980* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1981).
- ¹² Carter, "Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter," *Public Papers, 1977*, 2.
- ¹³ Carter, "Report to the American People: Remarks from the White House Library," *Public Papers, 1977*, 77.
- ¹⁴ Carter, "The State of the Union: Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1978* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979), 91.
- ¹⁵ Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," *Public Papers, 1979*, 103.
- ¹⁶ Carter, "Energy and National Goals: Address to the Nation," *Public Papers, 1979*, 1235.
- ¹⁷ Carter, "Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the 1980 Democratic National Convention," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1980* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1981), 1534.
- ¹⁸ In November of 1977, Carter released a statement of support for the bill once it was amended. Carter's words again reveal his support for the ideal, but also the lack of commitment concerning the mechanisms to achieve the ideal. Carter explained that the bill would "establish the commitment of the Federal Government to achieve full employment," which was defined as an overall unemployment rate of 4 percent by 1983. Despite the bill's "commitment" to full employment, it only "set out considerations" to guide the President and the Congress "in the event" that new programs were needed to fight unemployment. The bill did not "authorize any such programs," but "commended" them for use if necessary. See Carter, "Full Employment and Balanced Growth Bill: Statement by the President," *Public Papers, 1977*, 2023.
- ¹⁹ Carter, "Interview With the National Black Network: Question-and-Answer Session With Representatives of the Network," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1344.
- ²⁰ Carter, "National Urban League: Remarks at the League's National Convention," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1349.
- ²¹ Carter, "The President's News Conference of November 10, 1977," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1994.
- ²² Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," *Public Papers, 1978*, 90.
- ²³ Carter, "Economic Report of the President: Annual Message to the Congress," *Public Papers, 1978*, 137; and Carter, "Comprehensive Employment and Training Act Extension: Message to the Congress," *Public Papers, 1978*, 392.
- ²⁴ Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1444.
- ²⁵ Carter, "Administration's First-Year Accomplishments: Summary of Domestic and National Security and Foreign Policy Accomplishments," *Public Papers, 1977*, 2137.
- ²⁶ Carter, "The State of the Union: Annual Message to the Congress," *Public Papers, 1980*, 115.
- ²⁷ Carter, "East Rutherford, New Jersey: Interview With Dick Leone of WNET-TV," *Public Papers, 1979*, 2034-2035.

- ²⁸ Carter cited the number in some campaign ads, as well as specific campaign speeches such as Carter, “Campaign Rally at Hot Springs, Alaska, September 17, 1976,” and “Conference with Black Press in Chevy Chase, MD, October 2, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ²⁹ Adjectives collected from a variety of speeches, including Carter, “Campaign Rally at Hot Springs, Alaska, September 17, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, “Conference with Black Press in Chevy Chase, MD, October 2, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; “Speech in Salt Lake City, UT, October 7, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, “Report to the American People Remarks From the White House Library,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 71; Carter, “Department of Agriculture: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Department Employees,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 159; Carter, “Clinton, Massachusetts: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Clinton Town Meeting,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 385.
- ³⁰ Carter, “Department of Agriculture: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Department Employees,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 173.
- ³¹ See, for example, Carter, “Rally at Hot Springs, Alaska, September 17, 1976;” Carter, “Conference with Black Press in Chevy Chase, MD, October 2, 1976;” Carter, “Speech to National Conference of Catholic Charities in Denver, CO, October 4, 1976;” Carter, “Speech in Salt Lake City, UT October 7, 1976;” from *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*, and Carter, “Department of Agriculture: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Department Employees,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 173.
- ³² Carter, “Bardstown, Kentucky: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting,” *Public Papers, 1979*, 1342.
- ³³ In Oklahoma, someone asked why the government takes food stamps and welfare away from the elderly to give to “the dependent children for the mothers that are able to work, that won't work, when the elderly really do need the money, especially when they're in their seventies and are unable to work?” Carter again did not reject the stereotype. Carter, “Elk City, Oklahoma: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting,” *Public Papers, 1979*, 480.
- ³⁴ Mentioned in a Carter campaign ad and in Carter, “Acceptance Speech, July 15, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ³⁵ See, for example, Carter, “Speech in Dallas, TX, September 24, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, “Speech to National Women’s Agenda Conference in Washington, D.C., October 2, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, “Shopping Center Rally on St. Louis, MO, October 29, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; and Carter, “Detroit, Michigan: Remarks in a Panel Discussion and Question-and-Answer Session at a Public Policy Forum Sponsored by the Community Services Administration,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1845. For similar examples, see Carter, “Speech to National Women’s Agenda Conference in Washington, D.C., October 2, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; and Carter, “Department of Health, Education, and Welfare: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Department Employees,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 159.
- ³⁶ Carter, “Budget Message: Message to the Congress Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1979 Budget,” *Public Papers, 1978*, 186.
- ³⁷ “Too many have had to suffer at the hands of a political and economic elite who have shaped decisions and never had to account for mistakes or to suffer from injustice. When unemployment prevails, they never stand in line looking for a job. When deprivation results from a confused and bewildering welfare system, they never do without food or clothing or a place to sleep. When the public schools are inferior or torn by strife, their children go to exclusive private schools. And when the bureaucracy is

bloated and confused, the powerful always manage to discover and occupy niches of special influence and privilege. An unfair tax structure serves their needs. And tight secrecy always seems to prevent reform.” Carter, “Acceptance Speech, July 15, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

³⁸ Carter, “Speech in Dallas, TX, September 24, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

³⁹ Carter, “Speech to National Conference of Catholic Charities in Denver, CO, October 4, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

⁴⁰ Carter, “Democratic Party Fundraiser at Los Angeles, CA, October 7, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

⁴¹ Additional examples include, “My family doesn't draw welfare checks. And whether there's a maladministration of a welfare program in Georgia, my family didn't suffer. My family doesn't have to depend on a public health system for prevention of disease, because I'm able financially to pay a private doctor to give me and my family a semiannual or annual physical examination. And if I wanted my children to do so I could bypass the public school system, if I didn't like it.” See Carter, “Fundraising Function in Indianapolis, IN, October 9, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*. “Everyone in this group I would guess, suffers very little if we have an inefficient welfare system, or if the employment security agency doesn't function well, or if the criminal justice system is not fair. We are the kinds of people who have been blessed by God with superior opportunities. We are leaders, economically, socially, politically. And quite often when we make mistakes in government we don't suffer from those mistakes. Our families are not the ones who stand in line, when the unemployment rate goes up, to look for a job. And ours are not the ones who suffer when the welfare system is inequitable. And our families are not the ones who are deprived of adequate health care or dental care, if the public health system breaks down. And our families are not the ones who ordinarily would see our children go to prison if they are caught with a little too much marijuana, or if they engage in a hit-and-run accident. We can probably talk our way out of it or say, Judge, this is a good boy, I'm a local attorney or local businessman, engineer, or teacher, and I'll be responsible for my son. You just let him go, in my custody. But many families in this country don't have that right. And that child, if they're caught with a small amount of marijuana, or engaged in a hit-and-run accident they're going to prison.” See Carter, “Fundraising Function for Indiana Democratic Candidates, in South Bend, IN, October 10, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*. “This is bad enough as a statistic. But it is devastating to a family who for fifteen or twenty years have had their father or mother employed and for the first time starts drawing unemployment compensation. And after a few months, for the first time, stands in a welfare line. It tears apart the fabric of a family, and it destroys its self-confidence that is so crucial. In our government, local, state, and federal, quite often we forget that those of us assembled in this room with influence, with financial security, with social prominence, are quite often the ones who make decisions. And our families very seldom suffer when we make a mistake. When the unemployment rate goes up, rarely do the members of our family stand in a line looking for a job. And when the welfare program is confused, our families are very seldom touched by a welfare check or the absence of it. And when a crime is committed, we can pretty well rest assured that our children won't go to jail, if they are caught with a small quantity of marijuana, or involved in a hit-and-run accident. But there are many Americans who don't have that sense of security. Even as it relates to their own government. That needs to be changed. So I believe in compassion too. I believe that the 10 percent of the people on welfare who are able-bodied ought to be trained, given literacy instructions, matched with a job, offered a job, and put to work. And the other 90 percent who can't work should be treated with understanding and respect.” Carter, “Liberal Party Dinner at New York, New York, October 14, 1976,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.

- ⁴² Carter, "Welfare reform Legislation: Message to the Congress on the Proposed Legislation," *Public Papers, 1978*, 939.
- ⁴³ Carter, "Inaugural Address of President Jimmy Carter," *Public Papers, 1977*, 4. Carter announced the White House Conference on Families on January 30, 1978.
- ⁴⁴ Carter, "Speech from Austin, TX: LBJ/JFK Libraries Symposium on the Great Society, September 12, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "Welfare reform Legislation: Message to the Congress on the Proposed Legislation," *Public Papers, 1979*, 938.
- ⁴⁵ Carter, "Welfare reform: Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines," *Public Papers, 1977*, 771.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1443; and Carter, "Administration's First-Year Accomplishments: Summary of Domestic and National Security and Foreign Policy Accomplishments," *Public Papers, 1977*, 2137.
- ⁴⁷ Carter, "United Auto Workers: Remarks at the Union's Convention in Los Angeles," *Public Papers, 1977*, 892.
- ⁴⁸ See, for example, Carter, "Campaign Rally at Hot Springs, Alaska, September 17, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "Speech to National Conference of Catholic Charities in Denver, CO, October 4, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1443; Carter, "Welfare reform: Message to the Congress, August 6, 1977," 1451; Carter, "Kansas City, Missouri: Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Conference of Catholic Charities," *Public Papers, 1979*, 1928.
- ⁴⁹ Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1979*, 1441; Carter, "Welfare reform: Message to the Congress," *Public Papers, 1979*, 1452. Using a "Midwestern state" where a father who left part-time employment paying \$2,400 a year for a full-time job paying \$4,800 a year would lose more than \$1,250 due to the loss of benefits.
- ⁵⁰ See, for example, Carter, "Campaign Rally at Hot Springs, Alaska, September 17, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "Conference with Black Press in Chevy Chase, MD, October 2, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "Speech to National Conference of Catholic Charities in Denver, CO, October 4, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1979*, 1443; Carter, "Kansas City, Missouri: Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Conference of Catholic Charities," *Public Papers, 1979*, 1928.
- ⁵¹ Some Carter 1976 campaign ads called for the removal of rules that "forced fathers to leave the home." Other speeches where similar claims were made include "Conference with Black Press in Chevy Chase, MD, October 2, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; "Speech in Salt Lake City, UT October 7, 1976," *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*; Carter, "Welfare reform: Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines," *Public Papers, 1977*, 773; Carter, "The President's News Conference of August 6, 1977," *Public Papers, 1977*, 1443; Carter, "Administration's First-Year Accomplishments: Summary of Domestic and National Security and Foreign Policy Accomplishments," *Public Papers, 1977*, 2136.
- ⁵² Carter, "Clinton, Massachusetts: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Clinton Town Meeting," *Public Papers, 1977*, 385.
- ⁵³ Carter, "Welfare reform: Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines," *Public Papers, 1977*, 773. The figure of \$9,530 was later corrected to \$8,970 by the White House Press Office.

- ⁵⁴ Carter explained, “In most cases two-parent families are not eligible for cash assistance and, therefore, a working father often can increase his family’s income by leaving home. In Michigan, a two-parent family with the father working at the minimum wage has a total income, including tax credits and food stamps, of \$5,922. But if the father leaves, the family will be eligible for benefits totaling \$7,076.” See Carter, “Welfare reform: Message to the Congress,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1452.
- ⁵⁵ Carter, “Report to the American People: Remarks from the White House Library,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 75; Carter, “United Auto Workers: Remarks at the Union’s Convention in Los Angeles,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 877; Carter, “Welfare reform: Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 771; Carter, “The President’s News Conference of August 6, 1977,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1443.
- ⁵⁶ Carter, “Welfare reform: Message to the Congress,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1451.
- ⁵⁷ Carter, “Springfield, Illinois: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Members of the State Legislature,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 988.
- ⁵⁸ Carter, “The President’s News Conference of August 6, 1977,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1450.
- ⁵⁹ See, for example, Martin Anderson, “Why Carter’s Welfare Reform Plan Failed,” *Policy Review* 5 (1978): 37.
- ⁶⁰ Carter, “Welfare reform: Remarks at a News Briefing on Goals and Guidelines,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 771.
- ⁶¹ Carter, “United Auto Workers: Remarks at the Union’s Convention in Los Angeles,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 892.
- ⁶² On September 16th, only a month after the announcement of the PBJI, Carter had already accepted that the program would “take a great deal of debate and study” and could not be “concluded during this calendar year.” Carter, “Interview With the President: Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With a Group of Editors and News Directors,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1616. A few weeks later, Carter was again pointing to the difficulty of the issue and praising the debate that would occur: “But I know how difficult it is, how controversial it is. But this question has to be openly debated so that the American people can understand the challenges that have been presented and the solutions that have been proposed. Carter, “Democratic National Committee: Remarks at the Committee’s Quarterly Meeting,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1747.
- ⁶³ Carter, “The President’s News Conference of October 27, 1977,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 1913 - 1914.
- ⁶⁴ Carter, “The President’s News Conference of November 10, 1977,” *Public Papers, 1977*, 2000.
- ⁶⁵ For an analysis of the political conflicts behind the PBJI, see R. Kent Weaver, *Ending Welfare as We Know It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 63-64.

CHAPTER V

RONALD REAGAN AND THE DANGERS OF GOVERNMENT

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, along with the first Republican senate since 1953, he and his policies took the debate over welfare and poverty to a different level. Reagan brought with him an anti-government message that relied in part on the welfare system as a key example of government's ineffectiveness, extraordinary cost, and counterproductive tendencies. Reagan pushed for and ultimately signed legislation that reduced costs and tightened eligibility of the nation's various poverty programs, resulting in what one sociologist described as "eight years of unremitting horror for the nation's poor"¹

This chapter focuses on Reagan's rhetoric concerning welfare and poverty during his 1980 campaign and his two terms in office. Reagan has typically been heavily criticized for his "attacks" on the poor. Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, for example, argued that the Reagan administration waged what they characterized as a "relentless attack on the poor, depicting them as deviants unwilling to fit into mainstream America."² When examined closely, however, Reagan's anti-welfare rhetoric was actually rather subdued. Reagan's infamous attack on the Chicago "welfare queen," for example, was an exception to the rule. For the most part, this rhetorical analysis of Reagan's welfare rhetoric reveals that the poor were rarely targets for Reagan, rather government bureaucrats most often received the brunt of his criticism.

A key finding of this analysis is the manner in which Reagan's particular framing of the role of government and the causes of poverty worked to neutralize three of the primary dilemmas of poverty and reduce the impact of the fourth. In doing so, Reagan was able to avoid the difficult tensions inherent to the dilemmas, and provide the American people with a simple, optimistic worldview that clearly resonated with many of them. Although Reagan's theory worked to justify the policies that cut programs to the poor, it nonetheless supported the broad progressive ideals of full employment and equal opportunity.

The analysis presented here also reveals that Reagan's welfare rhetoric had two distinct stages. From 1980 to 1986, unlike Johnson, Nixon, and Carter, Reagan's overall rhetorical goal was not to justify increased spending and controversial new ideas in order to redefine the welfare system. Rather, his goal was to defend cuts that were perceived by many as disproportionately falling on the poor. As explained by Michael Weiler, "Reagan's central political challenge was to cut poverty programs while at the same time avoiding the appearance of indifference to the needs of the poor."³ This dilemma caused Reagan's rhetoric to read often like an apologia as he offered a wide array of responses to the charges levied against him and his policies.

During these first six years, therefore, Reagan's cost-cutting rhetoric represented a fundamental, yet temporary, shift in rhetoric from his predecessors, as the focus on reducing the cost of welfare, rather

than improving its impacts, required a new problem definition. Reagan's vision of welfare returned to the original purpose as imagined by Franklin Roosevelt: the sustenance of unemployables, and nothing more. Absent from Reagan's rhetoric was the need to redefine welfare as a vehicle to turn the idle poor into more productive members of society that was so critical to Johnson, Nixon, and Carter. In the end, Reagan's plan to fix welfare was rather simple, cut welfare back to help only the "truly needy," which would eventually help stimulate the economy and create more jobs, so that everyone other than the truly needy would be gainfully employed. In other words, Reagan's philosophy represented a return to the pre-New Deal assumptions that free enterprise would provide full employment as long as government did not interfere by trying to do too much.

Reagan's adjusted problem definition explains, in part, his reluctance to criticize the poor, as Reagan relied primarily on an argument that many of the poor were simply unneedy rather than either unworthy of assistance or in need of more extensive help. Reagan's philosophy required a rather positive image of the poor, since they could not require any real assistance to become self-sufficient. Reagan's rhetoric from 1980 to 1986 also for the most part avoided specific discussions or criticisms of welfare and its impacts on individuals, but rather focused on government programs in general and their impacts on the economy, which in turn hurt all Americans, both rich and poor. From 1980 to 1986, Reagan's rhetoric consistently followed this new problem definition despite the extensive barrage of criticism he faced, especially concerning the hardships his policies were accused of inflicting on the poor.

Starting with the 1986 State of the Union and continuing to the end of his presidency, however, Reagan's welfare rhetoric shifted back to the familiar pattern established since the 1960s, with two key differences. Once again welfare's specific flaws took center stage, particularly its link with dependency, and once again the solution to these flaws would require a redefinition of the purpose of welfare from sustenance to rehabilitation. Reagan did, however, frame this shift within a strong anti-Washington rhetoric that called upon the genius of states and communities to design solutions to welfare's anti-work, anti-family, and dependency-causing nature. Although Reagan would not propose the expensive solutions offered by Johnson, Nixon, and Carter, nonetheless philosophically his rhetoric from 1986 to 1988 was similar to even that of Johnson. Finally, in 1988, Reagan would support and sign the Family Support Act, a bill that rejected the sustenance-only vision of welfare that Reagan had supported earlier in his presidency.

Ronald Reagan's attack on government made him an enemy in the eyes of many social policy scholars. Interestingly, Reagan's efforts actually worked to return poverty and inequality to the national agenda to some extent, in response to Reagan's cuts. Poverty historian James Patterson wrote that from 1980 to 1985 "poverty again became a source of considerable discussion and controversy, in part because the Reagan administration continued to assail various aspects of the welfare state. His rhetoric and that of other conservatives placed liberals on the defensive and sparked renewed debate over social policy."⁴ Due

to the negative response to his policies—practically every press conference included direct questions concerning the harm Reagan’s policies was inflicting on the poor—Reagan in turn offered a rather elaborate set of arguments to defend both his policies and character.

Reagan’s Record

Of all the presidents examined in this study, Reagan was the most successful at hitting the ground running and pushing his agenda quickly before the glow of his election win dimmed. He went on national television on February 18, 1981, to press his Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Bill,⁵ and, with the assistance of some obscure Congressional Budget Reconciliation rules utilized by David Stockman, was able to get the massive bill through Congress and on his desk by August 13. The bill included provisions to “tighten eligibility” for AFDC, food stamps, and student loans, and decrease funding for subsidized housing programs, school lunch, and Medicaid subsidies. The tightening of eligibility for AFDC was accomplished primarily by decreasing benefits for programs that assisted the working poor, such as income disregards, child care credits, and credits for work expenses. The bill also ended the job programs stemming from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), which provided 300,000 jobs at the beginning of 1981.⁶ Fifty-seven different categorical programs such as the Community Services Administration were consolidated into seven block grants and cut twenty-five percent. Additional cuts were made to Child Nutrition Programs, Women-Infant-Children food program, VISTA, and Legal Services.⁷

The exact figures on the extent of the cuts is difficult to target, in part because the continuing recession would have caused a significant jump in spending since many of the programs were means-tested entitlements. Overall, the bill decreased program funding roughly ten percent, primarily levied on the means-tested programs. *Congressional Quarterly* cites a figure of a \$35.2 billion cut from a \$740 billion budget through fiscal 1982. According to David Stoesz and Howard Jacob Karger’s research, 408,000 people lost their eligibility, and another 299,000 had their benefits reduced, at a “savings” of \$1.1 billion. The benefits of thirty-five percent of recipients who had been working were terminated by the legislation.⁸ The bill also gave states permission to use their Work Incentive Program funds to begin workfare programs (Community Work Experience programs) similar to the program Reagan had used in California as governor. These programs would essentially require able-bodied recipients to “earn” their benefits by working at a minimum wage level. By 1986, twenty-five states had taken advantage of that opportunity. While Reagan was very successful with his agenda in 1981, he did suffer some defeats. Congress did not consider Reagan’s social security overhaul proposal, and a second round of cuts announced in September received a negative response from Congress.

In 1982, the economy worsened, and unemployment reached a post World War II high of 10.8 percent. Pressure increased on Reagan concerning the cuts, but he held firm in his opposition to most spending programs. In his State of the Union address, Reagan introduced a proposal that would send 61 federal grant programs, including AFDC and food stamps to the states in return for the federal takeover of Medicaid. The plan was never introduced in Congress, however. Both the House and the Senate passed large public works programs, but Reagan's veto threats killed both bills before they reached his desk. Additional cuts were made to Medicare, food stamps, and AFDC, although not as drastic as Reagan originally proposed. Reagan did sign bills that increased unemployment benefits, as well as a new job-training program that replaced CETA but did not include public jobs and provided a larger role for state and local governments. Over two million additional U.S. Americans fell under the poverty line in 1982, increasing the percentage from 11.7 percent to 14 percent. At the same time, the number of people receiving AFDC and food stamps decreased.⁹

The Republicans lost seats in the House during the midterm elections of 1982, but maintained their majority in the Senate. In general, Reagan and Congress turned their focus to foreign affairs in 1983. The economy had begun to improve, but the deficit nonetheless hit a record \$195.4 billion. Domestically, the debate over the federal deficit tended to dominate, and Reagan for the most part attempted to avoid the fray. A compromise social security overhaul bill was passed that once again "rescued" the program from fiscal problems. Congress also passed a \$4.6 billion jobs program that was designed to fit within Reagan's \$5 billion limit, as well as extending supplemental unemployment benefits on two occasions. A second job program failed to pass, in part due to Reagan's opposition and because the unemployment rate began to improve later in the year.

In 1984, Reagan met with "many disappointments on Capitol Hill," according to the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*.¹⁰ Congress worked to restore some of the earlier cuts to social-welfare programs, but was primarily focused on the deficit problem. The economic recovery was stronger in 1984, alleviating some of the criticism directed at Reagan concerning the increasing poverty and unemployment. With the election looming, some minor bills concerning child support, child care, and Head Start were signed, but nothing major. Reagan did veto a program similar to Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps that would have provided \$225 million over three years. The House passed bills restoring funds to food stamps and other child nutrition programs, but they stalled in the Senate. In October, Reagan was re-elected by a landslide, and brought an additional 16 Republicans with him into the House, and only lost one Senate seat.

The deficit clearly dominated Reagan's agenda in 1985. On December 12, Reagan signed the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Anti-Deficit bill that mandated a balanced budget by 1991. The bill would have the effect of severely limiting additional spending, though House Democrats were able to exempt most of the welfare programs from the bill, including AFDC, food stamps, SSI, and Medicaid. Amidst reports of

growing hunger, Congress worked to expand eligibility and benefits for food stamps, and were able to procure Reagan's signature. Unemployment benefits were pared down when Congress phased out special assistance to the long-term unemployed. Congress had sought to extend the program, but Reagan's veto threats were too much to overcome. Congress worked on bills to reform welfare and expand Child Nutrition programs, but they failed to clear. The poverty rate had begun to improve with the growing economy, although it remained higher than when Reagan took office.

Congress compiled an impressive record in 1986, essentially ignoring the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act and defying Reagan by restoring or increasing funding for many of the social programs that had been cut during his first term. Congress expanded coverage of the Job Training Partnership Act, and re-authorized child nutrition programs and the federal government's non-entitlement anti-poverty programs such as Head Start, Low Income Home Energy Assistance Programs, and Community Service Block grants. Spending was trimmed on Medicare and Medicaid, however. Reagan placed welfare reform high on the agenda during the State of the Union address, but little was accomplished during the year. Reagan was able to fulfill his primary goal with a major tax reform bill that dramatically reduced income tax rates and was considered the most significant rewrite of the tax code since 1942. Most importantly for the working poor, the 1986 Tax Reform Act increased phase-in ranges and phase-out ranges for the Earned Income Tax Credit, and allowed a larger credit for families with two or more children. During the elections of 1986, the Democrats were able to recapture the Senate by winning back eight seats, and increased their House majority by five.

Congress continued its remarkable legislative record in 1987. The Democrats were not able to complete their high priority items in health, education, and welfare reform, but nonetheless pushed through a new version of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings, a Medicaid expansion, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act, and the Older Americans Act. The latter two bills provided over \$2.5 billion in aid to the needy. Reagan once again highlighted the need for welfare reform in his State of the Union, and both houses of Congress addressed the issue. After four attempts, a welfare reform bill passed the House in December, but Reagan vowed a veto due to its cost. Daniel P. Moynihan was working hard in the Senate on a compromise bill, but it never came to a vote. Economically, 1987 was a good year for Reagan, as unemployment fell to the lowest rate during his tenure in office.

During Reagan's final year, a major welfare reform bill finally became law. The legislation, the Family Support Act, was certainly helped by Reagan's efforts in three consecutive State of the Union addresses, but significant credit must be given to Moynihan for engineering the bill through Congress, as well as to a group of governors, including Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, for refusing to allow the bill to die. At a cost of \$3.34 billion, the bill required all states to accept AFDC-UP and operate work, education, and training programs for adult welfare recipients, strengthened child support enforcement, and offered extended child-care and medical benefits to individuals leaving welfare for work. Combined with the

extension of the Work Incentive Program that Reagan signed in July, the welfare bill continued the shift of emphasis in welfare reform from income maintenance toward work and training that was integral to both Nixon's FAP and Carter's PBJI. In doing so, however, it represented a distinct change from Reagan's earlier approach, which sought to target benefits to only those that could not work. Reagan's final year in office was also an unprecedented seventh consecutive year of growth during peacetime, and unemployment dropped to a near "full employment" level of 5.3 percent. After peaking in 1982, the poverty rate did drop throughout the rest of his term, but nonetheless remained over 12 percent of the population, higher than anytime in the 1970s.

Reagan's Rhetoric on the Role of Government

Ronald Reagan represented an interesting character in the sense that he became the head of the federal government by attacking the ineptitude of that government. Reagan thus represented a return to a pre-New Deal philosophy, although Reagan himself typically identified himself with Roosevelt's New Deal, while presenting Johnson's Great Society as a gross over-extension of the appropriate role of government. During his famous Commonwealth Club Address, Franklin Roosevelt explained the need for the federal government to come to the aid of the individual in the face of big business in order to "save" individualism. Government, in other words, joined together with the people to insure true freedom. Reagan, however, returned to the earlier philosophy that government was the enemy of individual freedom, not its insurer, thus freedom was served by limiting government.¹¹

In Reagan's first nomination acceptance address, he made his concern clear. He explained that "government is never more dangerous than when our desire to have it help us blinds us to its great power to harm us," and then went on to claim that it was "clear our federal government is overgrown and overweight."¹² Perhaps Reagan's clearest exposition of his overall perspective was during his first Inaugural Address, when he explained that in the "present crisis," government "is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."¹³ Throughout his speeches, Reagan blamed the nation's economic problems, including inflation, unemployment, and slow growth, on the runaway spending policies of the Democrats and the inherent flaws of government. He warned of the "cult of overwhelming government" and the "Federal Goliath, unleashed and uncontrolled," which had brought the country to the "economic brink."¹⁴ As argued by James Aune, Reagan tended to avoid relying specifically on free market rhetoric, but rather focused his attack on government while glorifying the values of freedom, work, religion, and family.¹⁵ These two points joined together through the simple argument that big government worked against those values, as evidenced most clearly, it would seem, through the workings of the welfare system, whose flaws were already very well known by the public. The solution to the current problems, therefore, was simple: government had to be reduced, and the problems would dissipate. The optimistic

argument clearly resonated with the American people, as did its author, who would become known as the “Great Communicator.”¹⁶

Despite the overall focus on the “dangers” of government and the need to control its excesses, Reagan continued to support many of the same broad progressive ideals expressed by his predecessors, including equal opportunity, full employment, and the need to care for unemployables, whom Reagan termed as the “truly needy.” Throughout his tenure, Reagan frequently invoked the goals of equal opportunity and the realization of the American Dream. His 1981 Program for Economic Recovery, for example, stated that there was “widespread agreement on the legitimate role of government in protecting the environment, promoting health and safety, safeguarding workers and consumers, and guaranteeing equal opportunity.”¹⁷ He also listed equal opportunity alongside individual freedom and personal dignity as the “principles that are the hallmark of our nation.”¹⁸ Although these ideals were similar to those of Johnson, the application of Reagan’s philosophy to these ideals resulted in an important shift in emphasis. With government as the problem, not the solution, the best path to full employment and equal opportunity for Reagan was, again, simply for government to get out of the way.

Although he expressed such ideals, he also understood that the nation was falling short of them, placing the blame, as expected, on overgrown government. In addition, Reagan often framed such goals as goals for the society, not necessarily just the government. While clearly acknowledging a government role in these endeavors, he often quickly moved to identify the important role of free enterprise and the “volunteer spirit” in assisting in their fulfillment.¹⁹ In his nationally broadcast address to the nation on his “Program for Economic Recovery” in September of 1981, he announced a “nationwide effort” to spark volunteer programs where “need exists.”²⁰ In particular, Reagan called upon America’s religious institutions to play the important role they once played as the “primary source of help for the less fortunate,” before they “seemed” to be “co-opted by government.”²¹ He strongly supported the growth of “private sector initiatives” which, he argued, were “almost invariably far more efficient than government in running social programs.”²² Reagan would later praise the record of growing and record setting level of volunteering in the United States, pointing to statistics concerning the number of hours and dollars given charitably as key evidence of American exceptionalism.²³

In sum, Reagan’s political philosophy served as an important overarching frame on his policies. Reagan’s strict anti-government philosophy represented a change from his predecessors. Whereas Johnson, Nixon, and Carter all criticized government, and welfare in particular, they nonetheless continued to rely on government solutions to address social problems. Reagan, however, identified government as the problem, rather than simply identifying specific government practices as problematic. Nonetheless, Reagan continued to support broad progressive ideals for American society. The optimistic goals, therefore, had not changed, rather Reagan had broadly redefined government as a problem, thus

inherently framing the reduction of government, with the aid of volunteerism, as the primary path to achieve those goals.

Reagan's Depiction of the Poor

Reagan's anti-government political philosophy relied in part on the assumption that the poor would be better off with less government. Such an assumption required a shift in the dominant image of the poor expressed by the previous presidents. The key distinction to Reagan's depiction of the poor was the line he drew between the "truly needy" and, one must assume, the not-so-truly needy. Reagan supported government assistance to the truly needy, and accepted that such assistance would essentially consist of the government providing continued sustenance to them. Reagan went to considerable lengths to frame his spending cuts as falling solely on the not needy rather than the truly needy. Reagan presented a rather sympathetic image of the truly needy, although the rhetorical importance of the image was more likely focused on its comparison to its opposite. Reagan's depiction of the not needy was varied. Primarily, he presented three different versions: the negative image of the welfare cheater, and the somewhat neutral images of the welfare dependent and what I will term the rational not needy. Reagan also relied upon two additional key depictions: a sympathetic depiction of the unemployed, and a sharply negative image of the bureaucrat. The latter did not represent a depiction of the poor, but is nonetheless exceedingly relevant to Reagan's overall perspective on welfare and poverty.

Reagan's welfare rhetoric thus focused upon these six primary characters: the truly needy, the welfare cheat, the welfare dependent, the rational not needy, the unemployed, and the bureaucrat. As argued by David Zarefsky, Carol-Miller Tutzauer, and Frank E. Tutzauer, Reagan's use of the phrase the "truly needy" represented a key dissociation that worked to divide two groups that had originally been considered as one. Through this dissociation, Reagan managed to reaffirm the government's commitment to helping the needy, while also serving notice that his administration would represent a significant break from the past. Reagan offered the typical list of the deserving poor as his truly needy. Announcing his program to Congress on February 18, 1981, for example, Reagan explained that the government would "continue to fulfill the obligations that spring from our national conscience. Those who, through no fault of their own, must depend on the rest of us—the poverty stricken, the disabled, the elderly, all those with true need—can rest assured that the social safety net of programs they depend on are exempt from any cuts."²⁴ The phrase "through no fault of their own" was a common one for Reagan when he discussed the truly needy, fitting within traditional deserving-undeserving assumptions.²⁵ Later in that speech, Reagan specified the programs that would continue to serve the truly needy, including "social insurance benefits for the elderly, basic unemployment benefits, cash benefits for the chronically poor, and society's

obligations to veterans.”²⁶ For the most part, therefore, the truly needy was composed of individuals not expected to work, or as others have termed them, the unemployables.

Reagan’s second primary character, the welfare cheat, was clearly the most negative of Reagan’s three-part depiction of the “not needy,” but was also the least frequent. Whereas Reagan’s reference to a “welfare queen” attracted considerable attention, he actually only referenced the example twice, both times in response to questions, and neither occurred during a major address. The first instance was during an interview with newspaper editors in December of 1981. Reagan explained that his cuts were “aimed at the abuses in the program, people that are collecting disability benefits and are not disabled.” He went on to explain that “This is the type of thing that we think there's much more of it than anyone realizes, as was evidenced in Chicago a couple of years ago with the—or a few years ago—with the welfare queen who went on trial. And it was found that in addition to collecting welfare under 123 different names, she also had 55 social security cards. So, this is where we were going to try and make some of the changes.”²⁷ Reagan used the Chicago example again during a question and answer session with high school students in January of 1983.²⁸

In general, however, Reagan relied on his experiences of reforming the welfare system in California as governor and getting the “cheaters and undeserving off the rolls” there to support his assumption that many on the welfare system were fraudulent.²⁹ Reagan typically offered ambiguous assertions when explaining how reforms in California that required welfare recipients to register for work or training resulted in a significant reduction in the rolls. In March of 1981, for example, he offered this explanation for what happened after 350,000 people were cut off from welfare:

We never had a single case of anyone suddenly appearing and saying, “I am destitute. I've been cut off welfare.” As a matter of fact, most of those people disappeared of their own free will, which led us to believe that under the regulations which bound us in our administrative ability, we were unable to really pin down how many people might be getting more than one welfare check. And when they just disappeared as the spotlight began to be turned on, possibly out of recognition that they were now going to be caught, the rolls just shrank. And it's this theory that is behind what we are doing.³⁰

In 1983, he described the California welfare recipients as “paper people” who were not “legitimately needy” and had realized they could be caught and thus simply disappeared.³¹ Reagan referenced the example again in 1986.³² Beyond this handful of examples, however, Reagan in general avoided directly disparaging the poor. He certainly focused on “waste, fraud, and abuse,” but he tended to cite figures and the results of studies in doing so, rather than tell specific stories of cheaters. Even the welfare queen example was as much of an indictment on the system as the person. Reagan’s ire was clearly more often targeted to government and its bureaucrats, not the poor themselves.

Much more common in Reagan's rhetoric was the image of the "welfare dependent," an image that framed the welfare poor as victims rather than villains. In several speeches, such as during the 1987 State of the Union, Reagan described the welfare recipient as willing to work, but trapped in the dependency of the system.³³ On a number of occasions, Reagan used "slavery" metaphors to attack the welfare system, calling for its recipients to be "emancipated."³⁴ Reagan also told a story about a woman in California that managed to escape her welfare "security blanket" thanks to Reagan's reforms:

After we undertook our welfare reforms in California, I received a letter from a woman with several children who had been on Aid to [Families With] Dependent Children. She wrote that she had become so dependent on the welfare check that she even turned down offers of marriage. She just could not give up that security blanket that it represented. But she said that she'd always known that it couldn't go on, couldn't last forever. So when our reforms began, she just assumed that the time had come and that somehow she would be off welfare. So she took her children and the \$600 she had saved from her, as she put it, so-called "poverty," and went to Alaska, where she had relatives. And she was writing the letter now not to complain about our reforms, but to tell me that she had a good job and that working now had given her a great deal of self-respect, for which she thanked me, and then one line that I'll never forget. She said, "It sure beats daytime television."³⁵

In general, Reagan defined government as the problem that blocked the progress of its recipients, not a lack of effort on the part of the recipients themselves. Reagan often repeated that people on welfare were not lazy but rather wanted independence from the welfare system and its social workers. In his remarks to the National Alliance of Business in October of 1981, for example, he explained that welfare recipients "are economically trapped in welfare. They'd like nothing better than to be out in the work-a-day world with the rest of us. Independence and self-sufficiency is what they want. They aren't lazy or unwilling to work, they just don't know how to free themselves from that welfare security blanket."³⁶ Many of the sins of the welfare system that Reagan listed, especially during his second term when welfare reform was high on the agenda, worked to deflect negative attention from welfare recipients themselves. Welfare demoralized the poor, and robbed them of not only their self-respect and their dignity, but of "the tools to break the cycle of dependency" as well.³⁷

In sum, welfare was a trap, a "creator and reinforcer of dependency,"³⁸ and its dependent recipients its victims, hence worthy of sympathy. These dependent figures were, however, still considered to be among the "non-needy." Within Reagan's logic, the act of removing them from welfare was all that was necessary. Government could help the most by not helping at all, thus, similar to the woman in the story above, the individuals would become self-sufficient.

Reagan's third key depiction of the "not needy" will be entitled the "rational not needy." This group was not clearly defined, but was certainly distinct from the welfare cheats and the welfare dependent. Reagan framed the rational not needy primarily as individuals who were not truly in need of government services such as welfare, food stamps, or free school lunches, but were nonetheless accepting their benefits. At times Reagan would frame them negatively by calling them "greedy" or accusing them of "taking advantage" of the various programs.³⁹ But again, for the most part, Reagan placed the blame on the complicated system, its calculating bureaucrats, or the spendthrift Democrats. Here is where Reagan most clearly dissociated the truly needy from the not needy. More than once, for example, Reagan contrasted the "technically" eligible from the "morally" eligible.⁴⁰ With this dissociation, Reagan was implying that while these individuals were not being fraudulent—they were following the rules as written—they were nonetheless receiving benefits despite not having "the need that justifies their being there."⁴¹ He explained that there was no "moral or legitimate reason" for them to be recipients of these services.⁴² They had made their way onto the rolls due to "abuses in the interpretation of regulations" and "overbroad criteria"⁴³ They were not truly needy, but were "on the periphery," and represented the "fat" Reagan's cuts would eliminate.⁴⁴ Reagan would cite examples where people 150 percent or 185 percent over the poverty level continued to receive benefits.⁴⁵ Simply put, Reagan defined that the problem was "not government doing too much for the needy, but government doing too much for the non-needy."⁴⁶

In policy impact, this position translated into a decrease in benefits to the "working poor," although Reagan avoided that label. Many of Reagan's cuts in the 1981 OMBR were designed to reduce payments made to welfare recipients that were also working. Thus, rather than take the position supported by Nixon and Carter of *increasing* benefits to the working poor in order to increase the incentive to work. Reagan, in part supported by framing the same group as the "non-needy" rather than the "working poor," did the opposite. These policy changes also likely worked to decrease the political viability of the programs. As the programs grew during the 1970s to include more of the middle class, they also garnered stronger support. By "retargeting," "redirecting," and "tightening" eligibility for the programs,⁴⁷ Reagan was not only decreasing the cost of the programs, but he was also limiting their political support in the long run.

Reagan's position was backed both by the overall assumption that government assistance was counterproductive, and by the argument that providing so many benefits to the non-needy increased costs to the point that it was actually jeopardizing the assistance provided to the needy. Both these arguments, known respectively as the perversity and jeopardy thesis, were outlined by Albert Hirschman in his *Rhetoric of Reaction*.⁴⁸ The jeopardy thesis was particularly powerful for Reagan in this case because it specifically pitted the non-needy versus the needy. Reagan cited examples from his California experiences of how cutting the non-needy from the welfare rolls allowed them to increase benefits to those remaining.⁴⁹ Reagan explained the need to get those "not deserving of welfare" off welfare because "every

time someone who has the means and yet is subsisting on the help of their fellow citizens . . . they are reducing our ability to care for the truly needy.”⁵⁰ Reagan also pitted the non-needy with their “taxpaying neighbors,”⁵¹ and explained how the non-needy were cheating both the truly needy and the taxpayers by accepting benefits they did not really need. He made the point to explain how neighbors may be paying taxes to support programs that benefit neighbors who actually earned more money than them.⁵²

In addition to the truly needy and the three-part depiction of the not needy, two other characters figured prominently in Reagan’s poverty and welfare rhetoric: the unemployed and the bureaucrat. Reagan was strongly sympathetic with the former, at least rhetorically. As unemployment increased, and the criticisms of Reagan’s economic policy rose with it, Reagan began to discuss the unemployed more and more. He provided a clear external attribution for their troubles, and often noted their wish to work rather than receive a “handout.”⁵³ During his 1982 Labor Day Address, for example, Reagan offered support for the unemployed, saying:

Unfortunately, on this Labor Day, however, too many of our fellow citizens are unemployed. That's a terrible word, "unemployed." It means hardship, uncertainty, frustration, helplessness. Many who are unemployed feel caught up in something they don't understand and over which they have no control. And they're right. It's not the fault of the laid-off fellow in Detroit that he's out of work. It's not his fault the autos aren't rolling down the assembly line. It's not the fault of the unemployed mother in Delaware that the printing plant closed down, throwing her out of a job.⁵⁴

Interestingly, Reagan actually worked to humanize the disheartening statistics concerning unemployment. During a nationally televised address in October of 1982, for example, Reagan attempted to put numbers in “human terms”:

Some economic indicators are down; others are up. But the dark cloud of unemployment hangs over the lives of 11 million of our friends, neighbors, and family. At times, the sheer weight of all these facts and figures make them hard for anyone to understand. What do they really mean, and what can we do to make them better? Well, the first step is to understand what they mean in human terms—how they're affecting the everyday lives of our people, because behind every one of those numbers are millions of individual lives—young couples struggling to make ends meet, teenagers looking for work, older Americans threatened by inflation, small businessmen fighting for survival, and parents working for a better future for their children.⁵⁵

In a radio speech a month later Reagan expressed his “personal ache” for the “real people who were hurting” behind the “cold government statistics” on unemployment.⁵⁶ In 1983, he again rejected the notion that the unemployed were “just statistics,” but rather represented “human hardship and suffering” and “unhappy families with lifetime savings eaten up and dreams for the future destroyed.”⁵⁷ Reagan often

discussed his own experiences during the Great Depression in order to express his identification with the difficulties of unemployment.⁵⁸

Despite Reagan's sympathy for the unemployed, he tended not to act strongly for their cause. Once again, within his philosophical perspective, short-term efforts to help the unemployed would result in more problems in the long term. Reagan therefore tended to point toward other economic trends that were improving, and asked the unemployed to have patience as his economic program took effect. Reagan could be sympathetic with their plight but inactive partly because he blamed government programs for their plight, thus, once again, inaction, or even retrenchment was the best policy in Reagan's eyes. Reagan also often pointed to newspaper want ads as a device to lessen the importance of unemployment figures.⁵⁹ For many, these references were assumed to be attacks on the unemployed, implying that jobs were available but they simply did not want to work. Reagan, however, sought to deflect this criticism, arguing that the issue was not lack of effort, but rather the mismatch between skills and jobs.⁶⁰ Overall, therefore, Reagan presented a positive image of the unemployed, but nonetheless continued to maintain the need for cuts and reject calls for additional government programs to help them.

The final relevant depiction to discuss concerning Reagan's welfare rhetoric is clearly the most negative: the bureaucrat. Of all his characters, the bureaucrat was the villain in Reagan's American story. Reagan was particularly clear on his opinion concerning the ulterior motives of the bureaucrat. Simply put, bureaucrats were calculating figures intent on "defending" and "growing" more bureaucracy in order to insure their middle-class lifestyle. Bureaucrats "must justify their existence," and were primarily interested in "preserving bureaucracy."⁶¹ They were "not interested in doing anything to help the people get off welfare."⁶² Bureaucrats were "more worried about losing their position rather than helping the people they represent,"⁶³ at least in part due to their "vested interest" or "economic self-interest" in welfare dependency.⁶⁴ Bureaucrats made a "nice living," because poverty was a "career for a lot of well-paid people."⁶⁵ Sometimes the "prime order" of a bureaucracy, Reagan argued, was to "preserve the bureaucracy."⁶⁶ Reagan complained often that the "biggest share" of money going to many programs, especially training programs, went to the bureaucrats, not the poor (much less the "truly needy").⁶⁷ The War on Poverty had created an "army of professionals" and a "new upper-middle class of bureaucrats" intent on "growing" bureaucracy and giving it "eternal life."⁶⁸ When criticism of Reagan's policies toward the poor grew, Reagan again blamed the bureaucrats, this time accusing them of fabricating stories and "suggesting distress" in order to "create an image" of Reagan "picking on the poor."⁶⁹ Reagan explained that a protest march on Washington was primarily made up of bureaucrats, again fighting for *their* interests.⁷⁰ In sum, bureaucrats were not only connected with a government that was inherently counterproductive, they also were accused of having hidden motives that harmed the poor (by increasing dependency) as well as the nonpoor (by increasing spending and thus causing higher taxes and slowing the economy).

In conclusion, Reagan presented an interesting array of characters when discussing welfare and poverty issues. The “welfare queen” is perhaps his most well known, especially to poverty scholars, but in reality was only a minor character mentioned twice in passing in minor addresses. Indeed, rhetorically, Reagan was much more supportive of the poor than Nixon. The villain for Reagan was not the idle poor, but the calculating bureaucrat, and to a much lesser extent the non-needy taking advantage of the sprawling welfare system. The most important issue evident within Reagan’s characterizations of the poor was the shift from the deserving - undeserving distinction to the truly needy - not truly needy. Reagan was not arguing that the not needy were *undeserving* of help, he was arguing that they were not *in need* of help. The typical image of the undeserving poor was one that consisted of blaming those poor for their poverty, thus justifying the lack of outside assistance. Nixon, for example, focused on the image of the idle yet able-bodied welfare poor, who were undeserving because they could work to support themselves if they wanted. For Reagan, the emphasis would not be on this idle poor, but rather on individuals receiving benefits that did not need them. For the most part, this included individuals who were working while also receiving benefits from AFDC, food stamps, or one of the other programs. In other words, Reagan reframed the working poor as the unneedy poor. Indeed, from this perspective, the problem of poverty was simply too much government that was causing dependency, and costing so much it slowed the economy, which in turn caused unemployment.

One last point concerning these characters concerns the degree to which Reagan seemed to pit their interests against each other. The bureaucrats, and to a lesser extent welfare cheats and the rational not needy, were the leading causes of the increase in spending that in turn threatened the benefits of the truly needy and caused more unemployment. The bureaucrats were also guilty of supporting the growth of the programs that trap the welfare dependent and lure the rational non-needy. Based on this logic, cutting benefits to all but the truly needy would help the sympathetic characters (the truly needy and the unemployed, as well as the rest of the nation through lower taxes and a stronger economy), and only harm the negative characters (the welfare cheat and the bureaucrat), while freeing the dependent poor from their “slavery” and taking away unnecessary temptation from the rational not needy. Also notable is the practical absence of any discussion of the “working poor,” an important depiction to prior administrations.

Reagan’s Attack on Government and Welfare

Reagan’s rhetoric concerning the welfare system will be considered in two rather distinct stages. From the 1980 campaign until 1986, Reagan’s anti-welfare rhetoric represented a departure from the trends evident from Johnson to Carter. Rather than focus on welfare’s specific flaws, Reagan focused on the cost and futility of government overall and, to some extent, poverty programs in particular. Most of Reagan’s criticisms during this time period worked to justify his program cuts. The 1986 State of the

Union introduced a change in focus for Reagan, as the welfare system itself and its numerous flaws began to take center stage. From 1986 to 1988, Reagan's welfare rhetoric shifted to mirror that of his predecessors, focusing on welfare's perverse incentives toward work and family and its link to dependency. This shift is important because the change in problem definition compelled a change in policy direction as well. From 1980 to 1986, Reagan was primarily cutting programs, not reforming or replacing them, so his criticism focused on their high cost and the lack of "true need." Reagan's rhetoric and proposals from 1986 to 1988, on the other hand, matched those of his predecessors in that they were focused on redefining and reforming welfare with both sticks and carrots in order to help its recipients become more self-sufficient.

Reagan on Welfare: 1980 to 1986

During the 1980 campaign and the first five years of his presidency, Reagan's attack on welfare was distinct from his predecessors in the sense that his target was "big government" in general rather than welfare specifically. The welfare system perhaps served as a key example of the failure of government, especially in the public mind, but nonetheless Reagan did not offer the usual litany of welfare's flaws that were so prevalent in the previous administrations. During this early period, Reagan focused his criticism on the cost and broader economic consequences of Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty, as well as the prevalence of fraud, waste, and abuse. As a result, Reagan sought primarily to cut welfare's costs by "tightening" eligibility. Reagan thus at first rejected the incentive-based approaches to welfare-reform that had dominated since Nixon's presidency, and seemed to accept the original function of welfare to sustain the dependent at a minimal level. This perspective was supported by Reagan's framing that those working and also benefiting from welfare represented the "non-needy" rather than the working poor. Three themes were particularly prevalent during this period: the increasing costs of the programs; the pervasiveness of waste, fraud, and abuse; and the strong criticism of Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty. Each of these themes supported Reagan's attack on big government, but nonetheless tended to avoid direct specific criticism of the welfare system.

In his Nomination Acceptance address in 1980, Reagan explained that he believed the federal government was "overgrown and overweight," and in need of a ~"diet."⁷¹ Throughout his early years in office, Reagan would turn again and again to the increasing costs of federal programs, welfare, food stamps, and housing programs in particular. Reagan often explained that such costs were tied to "so called entitlement programs," and thus would continue to grow uncontrollably unless significant action was taken.⁷² Reagan warned of a "Federal Goliath, unleashed and uncontrolled" that had brought the nation "to the economic brink," and "budgetary time bombs" that were "set to explode in the years ahead."⁷³ He

would often cite specific figures that were in reality quite alarming. During a speech at the Annual Convention of United States Jaycees in June of 1981, for example, Reagan told the audience:

In 1967 those automatic spending programs, what we called entitlements, amounted to \$57 billion—1967. Next year, they'll amount to a staggering \$428 billion, and our elected representatives don't have any control over them. If we do nothing to change these laws, the uncontrollable spending will grow to an unbelievable level of more than half a trillion dollars by 1984. The food stamp program in 1970 cost 577 million. Today, because of the built-in growth, the automatic growth, that program now costs us \$11.5 billion. That is 20 times as much just in these recent years. Federal housing subsidies were \$500 million just 11 years ago. Today, they're \$6.5 billion, and without adding even one single new subsidy, that sum will jump to over \$10.5 billion by 1985—21 times as much as it was 11 years ago.⁷⁴

In other examples he explained how entitlement programs had risen 453 percent in thirteen years, from \$63 billion to \$346 billion,⁷⁵ that the overall budget increased fivefold and the cost of welfare tenfold in twenty years,⁷⁶ that in fifteen years the cost of food stamps had increased 16,000 percent, Medicare and Medicaid 500 percent in 10 years,⁷⁷ that the Federal budget took 170 years to reach \$100 billion, but only 8 years to reach \$200 billion, just another five years to reach \$300 billion, and will double in another five years.⁷⁸ Within the context of Reagan's overall anti-government message, these numbers were likely persuasive. Reagan often blamed the country's economic woes, including unemployment, inflation, and high interest rates, on the "overgrown" and "overweight" government, and these statistics showed that the supposed sources of those problems were rapidly increasing.

Reagan added to the sense of alarm provided by these numbers by focusing often on what he saw as the "unrelenting national scandal" caused by the prevalence of waste, fraud, and abuse within the various programs.⁷⁹ The triumvirate was labeled as an "unchecked cancer" and a "monster" that was "plundering" the nation's pocketbooks.⁸⁰ To the statistics concerning the growth in costs, Reagan added statistics and examples that pointed toward the seriousness of waste, fraud, and abuse. Reagan cited special commissions or congressional committees that identified problems with waste, fraud, and abuse.⁸¹ He discussed, for example, how \$64 million had been sent to people through the social security system who had already passed away.⁸² He made light of this situation in a fund-raising dinner in Pennsylvania in 1982, telling a laughing crowd, "Now, yes, there are individual programs in there that have been changed. When you find a program, for example, in which thousands of people who've been dead for an average of 7 years are still collecting benefits from the government, I think it's proper to change that program."⁸³ He also referred a number of times to the California reporter who was able to acquire benefits through the use of several names.⁸⁴ He ridiculed a California work program that used fifty percent of its budget to support eleven administrators that oversaw a total of seventeen workers.⁸⁵ Later in his term, Reagan would often

cite the statistic that for every dollar that reached a “needy person,” two dollars were spent on administrative overhead.⁸⁶ He even cited the fact that the infamous convicted murderer the “Son of Sam” was receiving benefits while incarcerated.⁸⁷ He estimated that the cost of “fraud alone” was at \$25 billion, up to ten percent of the spending on all social programs.⁸⁸

The food stamp program was the most common target. In this 1982 State of the Union, Reagan argued that “[v]irtually every American who shops in a local supermarket is aware of the daily abuses that take place in the food stamp program.”⁸⁹ He provided a number of examples of problems within the program. He cited, for example, a study from Florida that concluded that 16 percent of recipients in the state had received food stamps fraudulently and another 15 percent had received too much due to bureaucratic errors.⁹⁰ In his 1983 State of the Union, he cited \$1.1 billion in food stamp overpayments.⁹¹ This focus on waste, fraud, and abuse set the groundwork for Reagan’s argument that the cuts to the programs would not hurt the “truly needy,” but would merely be absorbed by the programs through increased efficiency.

Typically after citing the spiraling costs of the various entitlement programs and the prevalence of waste, fraud, and abuse, Reagan would further explain that while the programs were “well-intentioned,” they had failed to “eliminate poverty or raise welfare recipients from dependence to self-sufficiency, independence, and dignity.”⁹² President Johnson’s Great Society programs and the War on Poverty in particular were targets for criticism. Reagan would frequently refer to the War on Poverty in passing, pointing out that Johnson had declared war on poverty, but that poverty had “won” the war. According to the notations in the presidential papers, such comments were evidently often met with laughter from the audience.⁹³ At times, citing conservative scholar Charles Murray, Reagan repeatedly made the argument that the Great Society programs had essentially caused more poverty, or at least were responsible for keeping the poor from overcoming poverty on their own. Reagan’s most extensive comments on this issue occurred during a fund raising dinner in 1983. Citing an article by Murray in *Public Interest*, Reagan explained how the expansion of government programs “coincided with an end to economic progress for America’s poor people.” Reagan supported this argument with statistics on how poverty fell from 1949 until 1964, but then in 1980, “with the full impact of the Great Society’s programs being felt,” there was a higher proportion of people living in poverty than in 1969.⁹⁴

Reagan’s strategic choices of what statistics to reveal were critical here, as the evidence is clear that while the War on Poverty did not end poverty, it certainly contributed to its reduction in the late 1960s and 1970s, especially with the elderly. Nonetheless, Reagan continued to argue that the War on Poverty was not only lost, but had caused more poverty.⁹⁵ While Reagan did criticize the War on Poverty, during this portion of his tenure, he did not focus primarily on the specifics of welfare’s supposed counterproductive tendencies. Rather, his argument focused on the big picture: “As social spending multiplied, economic growth slowed, and the economy became less and less able to generate the jobs and

incomes needed to lift the poor out of poverty, not to mention the fact that inflation stimulated by government growth hit the poor the hardest, especially by devaluating the payments of those on welfare.”⁹⁶

When Reagan did mention specifics concerning welfare’s impacts from 1980 to 1986, he again tied the criticism to Johnson’s Great Society, focusing on the difference between it and Roosevelt’s New Deal. Reagan attacked Johnson’s programs, for example, for “fostering” a “state of dependency” and “creating” a “new kind of bondage for millions of American citizens.”⁹⁷ In the 1985 State of the Union, Reagan attacked policies that “increase dependency, break up families, and destroy self-respect,” and resolved to “stop spreading dependency and start spreading opportunity . . . stop spreading bondage and start spreading freedom.”⁹⁸ During a speech in Atlanta in 1983, Reagan argued that the “dramatic increase in dependence was clearly associated with a change in the nature of public assistance,” specifically the switch from “direct payments” to the poor to the development of programs that required a “growing army of professionals.”⁹⁹ Later, he expanded on the distinction:

During the sixties and seventies, the Great Society and other Federal programs led to massive increases in social spending. Why, then, at the same time, did the number of Americans below the poverty line stop shrinking? Why did we see a drop in the number of males in the work force and a huge increase in births out of wedlock? I believe the answer lies in the firm difference between the New Deal and the Great Society. The New Deal gave cash to the poor, but the Great Society failed to target assistance to the truly needy and made government the instrument of vast transfer payments, erecting huge bureaucracies to manage hundreds of social programs. The Great Society failed in two crucial aspects: It fostered dependence on government subsidies, and it made the transfer of money from Washington bureaucrats to those in need seem like a mission impossible. I was a New Deal Democrat. And I still believe, today, that there is only one compassionate, sensible, and effective policy for Federal assistance: We must focus domestic spending on the poor and bypass the bureaucracies by giving assistance directly to those who need it. We must end dependency, eliminate quotas, and foster a vital, innovative economy that rewards all Americans according to their talent and hard work. If we do, we can enhance our democratic ideals and can make America a genuine opportunity society.

As evidenced by the quotation, Reagan would mention the connection between welfare and dependency during his first six years, but the primary thrust of his argument continued to focus on attacking bureaucracy, rather than welfare’s perverse incentives.

In summary, from 1980 to 1986, Reagan presented a rather simple, logical argument against the government’s anti-poverty programs. He established that the costs were increasing at an alarming rate. He then began to question the usefulness of those increases by attributing significant portions of those

increases to the prevalence of waste, fraud, and abuse. He then argued that not only were the costs of the programs skyrocketing, and not only were the programs not working efficiently, but the programs were actually counterproductive and caused dependency. If his framing was accepted, Reagan's solution of cutting government programs seemed justified. The cuts, while perhaps painful in the short term, would help the poor and the nonpoor in the long term, while continued increases would only harm both.

Reagan on Welfare: 1986-1988

In his 1986 State of the Union address, Reagan anti-welfare rhetoric shifted and began to match the arguments of his predecessors. During that speech, Reagan explained that welfare should be judged by the number of people that leave the program, rather than the number it served. In doing so, Reagan, like Johnson, Nixon, and Carter before him, was reframing welfare as a program to assist the poor to become self-sufficient, rather than a program that sustained the truly needy. With this shift, Reagan began to support increases in some of the programs he was criticizing earlier in his tenure. Indeed, Reagan proposed programs that at least in spirit mirrored the Great Society programs, although obviously with a much smaller scope financially. In addition, starting in 1986 and lasting until the end of his presidency, Reagan's criticism of the welfare system itself grew substantially, especially how it functioned as a perverse incentive to both work and family stability, resulting in a debilitating "welfare culture." In the end, the Family Support Act signed by Reagan in 1988 was much more in the spirit of past attempts at reform than the positions expressed during Reagan's first six years.

During the 1986 State of the Union, Reagan clearly shifted his focus and set his sights directly on welfare's often discussed flaws. In that speech, Reagan introduced a new line of arguments that would carry on until the signing of the Family Support Act in 1988. Borrowing the words of Franklin Roosevelt's speech when he proposed the Social Security Act in 1935, Reagan explained:

As we work to make the American dream real for all, we must also look to the condition of America's families. Struggling parents today worry how they will provide their children the advantages that their parents gave them. In the welfare culture, the breakdown of the family, the most basic support system, has reached crisis proportions—female and child poverty, child abandonment, horrible crimes, and deteriorating schools. After hundreds of billions of dollars in poverty programs, the plight of the poor grows more painful. But the waste in dollars and cents pales before the most tragic loss: the sinful waste of human spirit and potential. We can ignore this terrible truth no longer. As Franklin Roosevelt warned 51 years ago, standing before this Chamber, he said, "Welfare is a narcotic, a subtle destroyer of the human spirit." And we must now escape the spider's web of dependency. Tonight I am charging the White

House Domestic Council to present me by December 1, 1986, an evaluation of programs and a strategy for immediate action to meet the financial, educational, social, and safety concerns of poor families. I'm talking about real and lasting emancipation, because the success of welfare should be judged by how many of its recipients become independent of welfare.¹⁰⁰

The final sentence especially represented the shift, as Reagan, following Johnson, Nixon, and Carter, began to focus on the need to change the welfare program in order to encourage self-sufficiency, rather than focusing on cutting costs and redirecting aid to the sustenance of the “truly needy.”

With this new focus, Reagan began to recite the laundry list of welfare’s problems. In a 1987 speech during a White House briefing on welfare reform, for example, Reagan returned to Charles Murray’s research, where he discussed the “new bipartisan consensus” that “our welfare system” is “one of the most serious obstacles to progress for the poor.” After reviewing Murray’s argument concerning how poverty increased as anti-poverty spending increased, Reagan laid out the arguments for welfare reform from his self-identified conservative perspective:

How compassionate is a welfare system that discourages families that are economically self-reliant, that takes 6,000 pages of Federal regulations to explain, and is so complex it confuses and demoralizes the poor? How compassionate is a system that robs the poor of the tools to break the cycle of dependency? Well, the emerging consensus on welfare is finally agreeing with us that the Federal welfare system has become a poverty trap, a trap that is wreaking havoc on the very support system the poor need most to lift themselves up and out of destitution—the family. This growing bipartisan consensus holds that our current welfare system is not only a failure but counterproductive—the institutionalization of ghetto life where, as Bill Moyers put it in his special on this subject last year: “Mothers are children, fathers don't count, and the street is the strongest school.” And I just think conservatives should have a special interest in this because, as I've mentioned, our original skepticism about the welfare system has been sadly borne out by recent research. But second, strengthening the family has been among our highest priorities and, believe me, no one needs that strength and help today more than America's poor.¹⁰¹

From 1986 to 1988, Reagan focused primarily on how welfare “caused” dependency and broke up families, while also at times adding how it discouraged work, demoralized its recipients, and ultimately created an anti-American “welfare culture” that threatened the nation’s prosperity.

Welfare’s connection to dependency was perhaps the primary focus of Reagan’s late anti-welfare rhetoric. Reagan clearly extended the “welfare as slavery” metaphor that was mentioned sparingly during the first six years of his administration. Welfare was attacked as the “creator and reinforcer of

dependency,”¹⁰² and his proposals were tagged as leading to “emancipation.”¹⁰³ An administration study on welfare programs was given the title “Up from Dependency,” likely an allusion to Booker T. Washington’s autobiography, *Up from Slavery*.¹⁰⁴ Reagan’s “Economic Bill of Rights” included a call to “reform the present welfare system that promotes dependency.”¹⁰⁵ Throughout 1987, Reagan referred to poverty again and again as a “trap” caused in part by welfare, which, he argued, made poverty harder to escape.¹⁰⁶ Welfare acted as a “net of dependency” that took away hope and replaced it with “despair” and “futility.”¹⁰⁷ This focus on dependency worked well within Reagan’s broader arguments by disassociating government programs from the American values of freedom and liberty. Again, unlike Roosevelt and Johnson who focused on positive freedom and the need for government to insure opportunity, Reagan returned to the earlier negative notion of freedom as freedom *from* government, here conceptualized as a welfare system that ensnared its victims in “webs of dependency.”

In addition, Reagan returned to the anti-family argument against welfare that was so critical to Nixon in particular. Reagan blamed welfare for the “breakdown” of the family, often citing statistics concerning the number of single parent families and children born out of wedlock. In a special radio address on “welfare reform” a week after the 1986 State of the Union, Reagan provided an extended discussion of the connection between welfare and “the crisis of family breakdowns.” He explained that families were not even being formed in the inner cities, where mothers were teenagers and fathers were “often nowhere to be found.”¹⁰⁸ Family breakdown was the key attribute of what Reagan termed the “welfare culture.” Reagan clearly wove the explanation together with his broader narrative concerning the failure of the War on Poverty programs. He also focused on how the connection between welfare and family served as a particular point of concern for conservatives, as well as an area of common ground with liberals. In his 1987 briefing on welfare, for example, he made both points clear:

I just think the time is ripe for realizing our traditional concern with strengthening the family is directly related to this emerging national consensus on the welfare issue. I think conservatives and Republicans can now join with liberals and Democrats in reappraising that entire system and examining the reason for its failure. There is common ground. We all know it isn't working. We know there will be no easy answer—it's the belief that there were easy answers that got us into the situation in the first place.¹⁰⁹

From this point on, welfare’s negative impact on family was a common topic for Reagan.¹¹⁰

Whereas dependency and family breakdown were the two primary charges against welfare, Reagan also offered a few secondary criticisms such as welfare’s propensity to demoralize the poor and discourage work. That welfare “robbed” its recipients of their dignity and self-respect and demoralized them was a common point for Reagan.¹¹¹ The demoralizing influence extended even beyond the individual, as Reagan argued that welfare “weakens community values and self-esteem,” resulting in a

debilitating welfare culture.¹¹² Welfare's perverse incentives concerning work were mentioned, but they were never a key argument for Reagan. At times, Reagan would argue that welfare "undermines the willingness to work" or would cite economist Milton Friedman's belief that "If you start paying people to be poor, you're going to have a lot of poor people."¹¹³ Reagan also tended to glorify the importance of work, at times indirectly comparing welfare to work. Unlike welfare, work led to self-respect, self-esteem and independence.¹¹⁴

In sum, Reagan's rhetoric concerning welfare and poverty exhibited two distinct periods. From 1980 to 1986, Reagan tended to avoid discussing the specific issues with welfare, but rather focused on the cost, waste, and ineffectiveness of government programs in general. From 1986 until 1988, he began to focus much more intensely on welfare and its flaws, especially its links to dependency and family breakdown. The importance of the distinctions between two periods lies in their impact on Reagan's policy proposals. Reagan's anti-welfare rhetoric essentially served to define the problem, and therefore logically set up Reagan's proposed solutions. The following section focuses on how Reagan framed and defended his policies.

Reagan's Welfare Policy Rhetoric

Similar to his anti-welfare rhetoric, Reagan's solutions can be examined in two sections, with each logically matching his two framings of the problems associated with welfare. From 1980 to 1986, Reagan's policy proposals primarily involved cutting programs, especially through the use of tighter eligibility requirements. The cuts came during an economic downturn, and brought out an intense backlash. As a result, Reagan's rhetoric during this first period was primarily defensive, as he tried to deflect attacks on both his policies and his character. During the second period, from 1986 to 1988, Reagan's policy rhetoric shifted to focus more on changing the nature of welfare, rather than merely cutting it down. This rhetoric came during much better economic times, thus Reagan did not have to be nearly as defensive. He then sought to redefine welfare from a program of sustenance (and dependency) to one that leads to self-sufficiency.

Reagan's Rhetoric of Defense, 1980-1986

When Reagan signed the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Bill in 1981, he was met with significant backlash as many argued that he was abandoning the nation's responsibility to the poor, especially considering the difficult economic times. In seemingly every press conference or "town hall" type meeting during his first few years, Reagan was confronted with questions concerning his "meanness" toward the poor. The attack on Reagan often questioned both his policies and his character. In response,

Reagan delivered a remarkable array of arguments to defend himself. Indeed, his rhetoric essentially represented an extended apology. His apology involved a number of specific arguments. His primary rhetorical strategy involved reframing the popular view of the “cuts” his policies instilled through the use of a number of dissociations. Each of the dissociations worked to reduce the perception that the cuts were actually harming the poor. Secondary strategies included attacking his attackers by questioning their motives, expressing deep sympathy for those harmed by the economic times; and dissociating between short term “fixes” that were counterproductive and his long term plan that while painful for some, would provide crucial long term benefits.

The most elaborate argument involved Reagan’s reframing of the cuts. Whereas his opponents were framing them as cuts that harmed the disadvantaged at a time of need, Reagan countered with several alternatives. Reagan’s primary reframing was that the cuts did not affect the truly needy. His key tactic here involved dissociation. According to B.L. Ware and Wil Linkugel, dissociation concerns “separating some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context within which the audience presently views that attribute.” The rhetor essentially tries to create a new perspective by splitting the element into parts, dissociating from the more offensive part while associating with the less offensive part.¹¹⁵ As outlined earlier, Reagan split an element of the people being helped by the programs into two—the truly needy and the not truly needy—and dissociated from the idea of cutting aid to the truly needy (the more offensive side), and associated with cutting aid to the not needy (the less offensive side). “We have not cut the programs down at the bottom,” Reagan argued, but rather “where we have trimmed rolls, we’ve trimmed them up at the upper level.”¹¹⁶ Reagan bolstered this dissociation further by arguing that withholding assistance to the not needy would actually help the truly needy due to improvements that would occur to the economy.

In addition to the truly needy-not needy dissociation, Reagan also made a dissociation between cuts that actually affected those served by the programs and cuts that only reduced waste, fraud, and abuse or administrative overhead. For example, he discounted the “great deal of talk” about how the cuts “picked on the helpless, the needy, the poor, and that in some way we’re seeking to deprive them of the things that they must have because they have no place else to turn.” Rather, Reagan argued, “[w]hat we have really been getting at is the excessive amount of bureaucracy that it takes to deliver a dollar to a needy person or a helpless person in this country.”¹¹⁷ This dissociation fit logically with Reagan’s heavy criticism of the bureaucrat in general, especially in terms of their ulterior motives.

Reagan also dissociated between the more offensive element of cuts that represented true reductions in the level of funding, and the less offensive element of cuts that merely represented reductions in the rate of increase of the level of funding. For example, in a response to a question asked during a 1981 White House luncheon concerning whether his cuts would hurt the poor, Reagan responded, “Well, I think you’re going to be happily surprised. I think our situation has been greatly distorted. I want

to remind all of you of one thing. We're not reducing government's cost down to below what they've been getting in the previous year. We're reducing the rate of increase that has been built into them. And, no, it will stop short of the needy."¹¹⁸ In a 1982 press conference, Reagan weaved two of these dissociations together:

Now, as to the cuts in social reforms, most of what we have done in that regard has not been a cut. There has not been a cut in the overall spending on human resources.

Actually, there is an increase over the year before, and there will be an increase in '83 over '82 and on down the line. We have reduced the rate of increase in those programs.

But much of the cut is aimed at trying to eliminate from the rolls those people who, I think, are unfairly benefiting from those programs."¹¹⁹

He also used the dissociation of true cuts/cuts in increases to attack the Democrats, explaining, "There have been no budget cuts; all we've cut is the projected increase by the big spenders, the amount they want to increase the budget."¹²⁰

To bolster these dissociations, Reagan often cited figures concerning how much the government was still spending on social programs. These citations were not framed in terms of alarming audiences with the cost of the programs—although Reagan certainly did just that at times—but rather they were framed in terms of providing evidence that the government was still fulfilling its responsibilities to the poor. In other words, Reagan was defending himself by practically bragging about how much government was still spending, while his broader philosophy attacked that very spending. The basic argument was that the “safety net” was still in place. During his nationally televised “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery” in 1981, Reagan provided a typical example of this tactic:

Now, I know that exaggerated and inaccurate stories about these cuts have disturbed many people . . . Well, I regret the fear that these unfounded stories have caused, and I welcome this opportunity to set things straight. We will continue to fulfill the obligations that spring from our national conscience. Those who, through no fault of their own, must depend on the rest of us—the poverty stricken, the disabled, the elderly, all those with true need—can rest assured that the social safety net of programs they depend on are exempt from any cuts. The full retirement benefits of the more than 31 million social security recipients will be continued, along with an annual cost-of-living increase. Medicare will not be cut, nor will supplemental income for the blind, the aged, and the disabled. And funding will continue for veterans pensions. School breakfasts and lunches for the children of low-income families will continue, as will nutrition and other special services for the aging. There will be no cut in Project Head Start or summer

youth jobs. All in all, nearly \$216 billion worth of programs providing help for tens of millions of Americans will be fully funded.¹²¹

During his State of the Union in 1982, he mentioned that funding for social insurance programs will be “more than double the amount spent only 6 years ago,” that the Federal Government will still “subsidize 95 million meals every day,” which represented “one out of seven of all the meals served in America.”¹²² The 95 million meals were mentioned a number of times.¹²³ He would often cite specific increases, such as during a rally in Minnesota in 1982: “The outlays for the elderly in 1983 will be double what they were as recently as 1978. The income assistance to the needy, not counting social security, which was \$47 billion in 1980, will be more than \$60 billion in the new budget.”¹²⁴ At a conservative fundraising dinner, Reagan ridiculed the “the sob sister attempts to portray our desire to get government spending under control as a hardhearted attack on the poor people of America,” and explained that spending for entitlements “will actually increase by one-third over the next 5 years.”¹²⁵ Later, he mentioned “a few examples of the level of human services that we're still providing in the 1983 budget,” and proceeded to provide a list concerning the number of households receiving subsidized housing assistance, the loans or awards will be available for students in higher education, subsidized meals, Medicaid and Medicare services, and training and employment programs. He concluded by explaining that

while everyone is screaming that we're throwing people out in the snow to die. . . .

[t]hese examples clearly demonstrate that we in this administration are not turning our backs on America's needy. There's no question that we must protect those who are truly needy, care for those who are sick, feed those who are hungry, and shelter those who are cold. And we must build a better economy that provides a job for every American who wants one.¹²⁶

In sum, all these various dissociations worked to lessen the charges made against Reagan's policy and character by attempting to reframe the popular assumption of Reagan's cuts.

The first secondary tactic in Reagan's apologia was to turn the tables and attack his attackers, specifically in terms of the motives behind their attacks on him. Again and again, Reagan labeled the criticism against his policies as “misinformation campaigns,” “falsehoods,” “distortions,” “propaganda,” “wild charges,” and “pure political demagoguery.”¹²⁷ He labeled his critics demagogues on a number of occasions, and accused them of “needlessly frightening” the poor, especially the elderly, about reductions in services. These criticisms were often tied to his overall attack on bureaucrats, as he explained that the motives behind the attacks were that the bureaucrats concerned that the cuts would negatively affect their bottom line, not that of the poor. As explained by William Benoit, counterattacks such as these are often based on the assumption that if you can reduce the credibility of the source of the accusation, you can reduce the damage to your own credibility.¹²⁸

Another secondary tactic involved the expression of deep sympathy for those suffering from the difficult economic times, especially when their suffering was tied to unemployment. This sympathy worked to challenge the charges against Reagan's character. He spoke often of how his father suffered during the Great Depression. Reagan's sympathy for the poor despite his policies that cut programs toward them was nonetheless consistent from his ideological perspective. Since he blamed unemployment on a poor economy worsened in part by the size of government, to Reagan the cuts would eventually help the poor, and therefore were justified.

Lastly, Reagan used two additional arguments to bolster the view that his policies actually benefited the poor rather than harmed them. These arguments thus served as direct denials of the charges against his policies. The first argument focused on the connection between his policies and inflation. Reagan returned again and again to the effect his cost-cutting policies was having on inflation, explaining how inflation was the "cruellest tax of all" to the poor, especially the elderly poor on fixed incomes.¹²⁹ Rapid inflation, which he associated with the prior administration and with "big government" spending, "hit the poor the hardest" and was "more unfair" than cuts.¹³⁰ Speaking to the Economic Club of Detroit in 1984, Reagan explained in detail the effect of inflation on the poor:

The needy were hit hardest of all. A family on a fixed income of \$8,000 in 1979 was about \$600 above the poverty line, but in 1980 it was almost \$400 below it, as double-digit inflation eroded purchasing power and pushed the poverty line up. Inflation reduced the real value of government benefits and especially hurt the poor who were forced to spend a larger share of their income on necessities. In the last administration, per person Aid to Families with Dependent Children fell 10 percent. The value of the maximum allotment of food stamps fell by almost 6 percent. Now, these policies didn't just create unfair hardship, they were the very essence of unfairness. Despite the great torrents of rhetoric about compassion, the only people who benefited from those high inflation and interest rate policies were people wealthy enough to invest in expensive inflation hedges. Working Americans and the needy were left out in the cold.¹³¹

In other speeches, the anti-inflation nature of his policies were framed as the "greatest program for the poor," his "greatest success," and the "greatest thing we have done for the poor."¹³²

The second argument Reagan offered to explain how his policies actually helped the poor involved his typical dissociation between the short term and long term. Essentially, Reagan would accept that there was perhaps some short-term suffering occurring due to the cuts, but such suffering was necessary to fix the economy, and in the long run his policies would benefit all. This argument worked hand in hand with Reagan's expressions of sympathy, as Reagan sympathized with those suffering, while also explaining that his policies needed time. Indeed, all he could essentially offer was sympathy. The flip side of the argument attacked the short term remedies many called for—such as additional unemployment

benefits or major jobs programs—as they were seen as short term policies that created harm in the long run.

In summary, from 1980 to 1986, Reagan was forced due to criticism to defend both himself and his policies. In doing so, he offered a wide variety of apologetic responses that attempted to reframe popular opinion. He spent considerable time in addressing these negative perceptions, and his responses were generally consistent with his overall philosophy. Reagan relied most often on the rhetorical tactic of dissociation, as he expanded his earlier divisions between the truly needy and not so truly needy, adding dissociations between true cuts and cuts to increases, between cuts to actual programs and cuts to waste and fraud, and between the short term and long term effects of his policies.

Reagan's Policy Rhetoric, 1986 to 1988

With the 1986 State of the Union address, Reagan clearly shifted strategy in terms of welfare. By this point, the economy had recovered, and the cuts to the various programs had faded somewhat from the public agenda. During that speech, after attacking the “welfare culture” and the deterioration of the American family, Reagan charged the White House Domestic Council to present him with a full evaluation of welfare programs and “a strategy for immediate action to meet the financial, educational, social, and safety concerns of poor families. I'm talking about real and lasting emancipation, because the success of welfare should be judged by how many of its recipients become independent of welfare.”¹³³ Reagan iteration of the goal of welfare as assisting the poor to become independent of welfare represented a major change in focus. The primary image of poverty within Reagan's rhetoric switched from the unneedy receiving benefits that hurt the economy back to once again one of a welfare recipient trapped in a bad system. As shown earlier, with this switch Reagan began to focus much more on welfare's flaws. This new definition of the problem required a corresponding shift in policy solutions. For Reagan, the new policy direction focused on three recurrent themes: an overall focus on the reduction of “dependency” as the primary goal of welfare reform, and a reliance on “work” on the one hand, and state and local ingenuity and flexibility on the other, as the vehicles through which dependency would be reduced.

Reducing dependency clearly became the focus of Reagan's welfare rhetoric from 1986 to 1988. The manner in which Reagan called for a “reshaping” and “a major new national strategy” concerning the purpose of welfare was reminiscent of Johnson, Nixon, and Carter.¹³⁴ Rather than provide support to the truly needy, welfare was to be, as Reagan explained during his 1988 State of the Union, a “the first rung on America's ladder of opportunity, a boost up from dependency, not a graveyard but a birthplace of hope.”¹³⁵ Reagan often explained that the measure of success for welfare should be the number of people that are able to leave welfare every year.¹³⁶ Welfare would be “aimed” at “salvaging people and making it unnecessary for them to be on welfare” and “opening paths of opportunity.”¹³⁷ He expressed the goal as

being “a system that gives poor Americans the opportunity and aid to escape the tender trap of welfare and become more productive and self-reliant contributors to American society.”¹³⁸ This concern over dependency had a direct effect on Reagan’s policy proposals. During a 1987 radio address focused on welfare reform, Reagan explained that new proposal was based on his administration’s report entitled “Up from Dependency,” and its “central point” was “to test new ideas for reducing welfare dependency.”¹³⁹

Reagan’s proposal was given the name the “Low-Income Opportunity Improvement Act of 1987.” It never gained much momentum in Congress, but Reagan would actively encourage other proposals, especially proposals coming from the state level. In a speech to the National Governor’s Association in 1988, for example, he promised that he would “approve any State proposal that had a chance of reducing dependency as long as it ensured that needs continued to be met, it created no net increase in Federal costs, and it could be soundly evaluated.”¹⁴⁰ When Reagan signed the Family Support Act on October 1, 1988, he framed the legislation as “real welfare reform—reform that will lead to lasting emancipation from welfare dependency.”¹⁴¹ In sum, dependency was clearly identified as the key problem, and the purpose of welfare was redefined as an instrument to reduce dependency. Absent from Reagan’s rhetoric were the key images of his first seven years, including the truly needy, the welfare queens, and the devious bureaucrats.

The two key policy instruments Reagan focused upon to fulfill the new goal of dependency reduction were “work” and state or local initiative. Similar to Nixon, Reagan relied on the dichotomy of welfare and work during his final three years, while at the same time backing proposals that offered an obvious mix of both. The term “workfare” reappeared in presidential rhetoric, albeit not to the extent used by Nixon.¹⁴² Reagan did, however, expand the expectation of work beyond that of Nixon, as he attacked the “counterproductive exemption” that allowed mothers with children under 6 years old to bypass work requirements. Framing work requirements as “help,” he based his criticism on the need to “get early help to these women and their children before they become chronically dependent on welfare.”¹⁴³

Once again relying on the rhetorical tactic of dissociation, he often divided “true” or “genuine” welfare reform from false welfare reform.” True reform was tied to work requirements and dependency reduction. Reagan threatened to veto welfare reform proposals that were not “true”: “Any bill not built around work is not true welfare reform. If Congress presents me with a bill that replaces work with welfare expansion and that places the dignity of self-sufficiency through work out of the reach of Americans on welfare, I will use my veto pen.”¹⁴⁴ When the Family Support Act was passed, including some increases in the work requirements, Reagan announced that it was “genuine welfare reform” that was “geared to making people independent of welfare; and that means, among other things, that those who receive welfare must be required to work.” The bill only required work of one family member if both received welfare through AFDC-UP, but Reagan nonetheless boasted that he had “prevailed.”¹⁴⁵ Later,

during a GOP fundraising dinner in 1988, Reagan continued to exalt the virtues of work, proclaiming: “Work means hope and prosperity will ultimately vanquish poverty!”¹⁴⁶

Reagan’s second policy instrument designed to lead to the reduction of dependency involved a greater reliance on the states and local communities for ideas concerning anti-poverty programs. In a November 1986 message to Congress, Reagan explained this change:

Our proposal will ask that Federal welfare requirements be waived to allow States to establish a series of demonstrations in welfare policy. We are not proposing to cut Federal welfare benefits for the truly needy. The idea is to begin a process that will tap the hundreds of good self-help and anti-poverty ideas currently blossoming around the country. For too many years our Federal welfare policies have assumed that all of the answers could come from experts in Washington, D.C. Those policies have had 20 years to work and have failed. Our demonstration strategy seeks to find solutions to poverty and welfare dependency in the practical genius of the States, communities, and individuals who must cope with those problems every day.¹⁴⁷

In his 1987 State of the Union address, Reagan labeled his “new national welfare strategy” as a program of “State-sponsored, community-based demonstration projects,” rather reminiscent of both Roosevelt’s New Deal and Johnson’s Great Society programs.¹⁴⁸ To a group of community members in 1987, he emphasized the practical nature of relying on existing community groups, and the need to allow those groups more resources and states more flexibility:

And I’m told it’s the first time ever that government has gone, as we have, not to the people who can give you a theory about getting people off of welfare, but to the people who’ve done it themselves, in practice, or helped others do it. Success, not failure; practice, and not theory. And that’s what has shaped our welfare reform proposal, and that’s what we’ve come to hear about today. . . . That, in effect, is what our welfare reform proposal is all about: creating a welfare system that invests in your solutions, and in the solutions of thousands of others like you around America. Our welfare study “Up From Dependency,” which will be released today, names nearly 400 examples of self-help groups across the land. Our reform is intended to start a process that taps this spirit and mobilizes this initiative. And here’s what we propose to do. We will ask Congress to approve legislation to allow the States to experiment with the kind of antipoverty ideas that you’ve told us about here today. Right now Federal laws and regulations limit what the States can do. I was a Governor of a State, and I know how frustrating it could be. And that’s why so many of your good ideas can’t be tried within the bounds of our current welfare system.¹⁴⁹

In speech after speech, Reagan would praise the ingenuity of states and local communities within the context of welfare reform, as well as criticize the arrogance of the federal government. Reagan told the National Governor's Association that he wanted to "establish a process that allows States and communities to implement their own antipoverty ideas based on their own unique experiences."¹⁵⁰ During a radio address in July, 1987, he discussed the need to "let loose the creative energies of our States and localities."¹⁵¹ Announcing his legislation in February of 1987, he emphasized that the bill recognized that a "single, national solution to the problem of poverty and welfare dependency cannot work for thousands of distinct communities," and praised his bill for encouraging "diverse solutions for diverse needs and communities."¹⁵² He called for legislation that would give the states "added flexibility and encouragement to undertake truly innovative and individualized reform experiments."¹⁵³ In his 1988 State of the Union address, foreshadowing a metaphor upon which his successor would rely, he praised the "thousand sparks of genius in 50 States and a thousand communities around the Nation," and explained the need to "nurture them and see which ones can catch fire and become guiding lights."¹⁵⁴

When discussing this new reliance on states and local communities, Reagan often focused on key words such as ingenuity, innovation, spark, creativity, fresh, grass roots, and initiative. Alluding to the New Deal rhetoric of Franklin Roosevelt, Reagan praised the states, explaining that they "have always been laboratories for creative social change."¹⁵⁵ Reagan also redefined who should be considered experts concerning welfare, rejecting the role of experts in universities and think tanks for "real experts: people like a lady named Kimi Gray, a one-time welfare mother with five children."¹⁵⁶ When he introduced his own proposal in 1987, he explained that "[h]undreds of welfare recipients, former recipients, and self-help and welfare experts were consulted."¹⁵⁷ Later, he paraphrased Socrates, explaining "Knowing what you don't know is the beginning of wisdom" as he questioned the knowledge of the Federal Government and praised the knowledge of states and communities. He called for Washington to get a "dose of humility" and turn to them for help.¹⁵⁸

In summary, from his 1986 State of the Union address until the end of his administration, Reagan's rhetoric exhibited a distinct shift away from the themes that dominated his first six years, and toward themes that resembled the typical rhetoric of previous administrations. During his first six years, Reagan focused most intensely on the need to reduce the size of government in order to improve the overall economy, which translated in terms of welfare policy to a tightening in the eligibility criteria in order to reduce the rolls. Welfare was deemed only for the "truly needy," essentially those unable and unexpected to work. In response to the significant criticism he received for the reduction in services to the working poor, Reagan primarily focused on defending and reframing his policies during his first six years, utilizing a variety of rhetorical tactics to do so. Starting with the 1986 State of the Union, however, Reagan began to focus specifically on the need for welfare reform, particularly the need to redefine welfare away from the sustenance model he championed during his first six years to a rehabilitation model

designed to reduce dependency and make the poor self-sufficient. Reagan called for work requirements and flexibility at the state and local level in his attempt to fulfill the newly defined goal, and eventually would sign the Family Support Act in 1988. That legislation was very much in the spirit of reform proposed by Nixon and Carter in terms of shifting welfare from income maintenance toward work and training. Considering the bill's \$3.34 billion price tag and its extension of welfare to a broader base of recipients, it is clear the bill was based on ideas Reagan at least rhetorically rejected during his first five years.

Ronald Reagan and the Dilemmas of Poverty

Reagan presents a unique case in terms of how his rhetoric can be examined through the lens of the four paradoxes of poverty. Reagan's political philosophy rhetorically neutralized three of the four dilemmas, which may explain, in part, why Reagan was able to provide the American people with such an intoxicating and optimistic vision of America. Simply put, Reagan's particular framing did not require or expect Americans to make difficult decisions.

Equality versus Freedom

The freedom-equality dilemma first became particularly relevant during the Great Depression. It was placed at the forefront of American political philosophy with Roosevelt's Commonwealth Club address, when he framed the overwhelming poverty from that time as a violation of freedom and individualism, and subsequently reframed the role of government as a vehicle through which to insure individual freedom. Until that point, freedom was primarily associated with limited government. Although Reagan self-identified as a "New Deal Democrat," his philosophy actually revealed a return to the pre-New Deal laissez-faire conceptualization of the role of government which framed government as an enemy of individual freedom.

By framing government as the problem, Reagan was able to continue to express the same traditional American ideals of full employment and equal opportunity without having to support significant action in pursuit of that goal. To Reagan, government was the only primary barrier to the realization of the American Dream. A key point of evidence in support of these beliefs for Reagan was the dependency caused by welfare. To Reagan, that dependency represented the primary relevant violation of the notion of freedom, not poverty, inequality, or unemployment. Reagan even explicitly associated welfare with slavery, the ultimate denial of freedom.

In summary, due to his support of the laissez-faire philosophy, Reagan rhetorically neutralized the equality-freedom dilemma. Freedom and equality would both be served adequately as long as government was limited and free enterprise was allowed to prosper on its own.

Deserving versus Undeserving

Reagan likely provided one of the most well known images of the “undeserving poor” when he attacked the “welfare queens” that took advantage of the complex bureaucracy and allegedly lived more than comfortable lives through the use of multiple identities. That being said, overall Reagan typically did not rely on a strongly undeserving image of poverty. The welfare queen was actually an infrequent example, appearing only twice in two minor addresses. Overall, Reagan provided a rather positive image of the poor. Of Reagan’s primary characters, the most negative was actually the bureaucrat. He provided sympathetic images of the unemployed, the truly needy, and even the welfare dependent, and a rather neutral image of the rational not needy. For the most part, Reagan attacked government and framed the poor as either victims of that government, or as individuals taking advantage of programs inherently prone to being taken advantage of.

Key to understanding Reagan’s depiction of the poor was his reliance on a needy-not needy distinction rather than the typical deserving-undeserving split. Rather than argue that some of the poor were undeserving of help, Reagan argued that many of the recipients simply did not need help. The critical distinction between the two may explain, in part, Reagan’s generally sympathetic depiction of the poor. In order to argue that the poor are undeserving of help, a negative image would be necessary in order to overcome the natural impulses of sympathy and pity. As Aristotle argued, the emotion of pity requires the perceptions of some undeserved harm to occur to the subject. The deserving-undeserving image, therefore, has traditionally relied upon negative images of the poor to justify the lack of assistance, and, in the end, to justify their suffering. It was, therefore, a rather pessimistic model. It assumed poverty would always exist due to flaws in human nature.

The truly needy-not needy distinction, however, does not require this negative image of the poor. Indeed, for Reagan’s purposes, the truly needy-not needy distinction called for a generally positive image. Reagan’s primary rhetorical problem during his first six years was avoiding the appearance of harming the poor while instilling his program cuts. Providing a negative image of the poor would likely have made this problem even more difficult. If the poor were unneedy, then the cuts, as Reagan argued, did not actually harm anyone (other than the bureaucrats with ulterior motives). Perhaps even more importantly, by arguing that the poor were unneedy, rather than undeserving, Reagan could maintain the much more optimistic image that was key to his overall persona. Reagan was, in a way, redefining the traditional pessimistic conservative position on poverty. Poverty was not inherent due to human nature, but rather

was merely the product of overgrown government. Once again, if free enterprise was allowed to reign free, poverty could be diminished, even abolished. The problem was not in people, it was in government. In summary, Reagan essentially avoided the deserving-undeserving dilemma just as he avoided the freedom-equality dilemma. His particular rhetorical framing made the distinction irrelevant. Whether or not the poor were deserving or undeserving of help was immaterial precisely because as long as government did not overstep its bounds, they simply should not need help within Reagan's worldview.

Help versus Hinder

Reagan's laissez-faire perspective on government clearly translated into a position that assumed the tendency of government programs to cause harm greatly outweighed their capability to help. So while Reagan rendered the first two dilemmas somewhat moot, with this dilemma he focused only on one side and dismissed the other. Johnson, Nixon, and Carter understood that government programs would inherently include inefficiencies, but they also tended to recognize their worth. Reagan often detailed the harm of government programs, but rarely its ability to help. During his first six years, Reagan focused his attack on government in general, especially in terms of its impact on the economy. During his last three years, Reagan began to focus more specifically on the negative impacts of welfare, including its link to dependency and family breakup. Reagan did accept the notion that the government had a role in helping the truly needy, but to him the truly needy only included the unemployables, so the programs were not called upon to rehabilitate the poor, only provide sustenance. Reagan's disregard for possible benefits stemming from government programs was probably best exemplified by his attack on the War on Poverty. While statistics clearly show that Johnson's Great Society programs had some significant positive effects on poverty in general and poverty amongst the elderly in particular, Reagan's rhetoric implied a simple negative linear relationship, a statistical inaccuracy.

During his final three years, Reagan's welfare rhetoric seemed to allow for some positive effects from government programs considering his support for Moynihan's welfare reform proposals. No longer was welfare merely for the unemployables and the scaling back of government the only solution. That being said, Reagan was generally able to maintain a perception of consistency due to the particular framing of his support. By again framing dependency, not poverty or unemployment, as the problem, Reagan continued to place blame on government. Then, by relying on state and local solutions to dependency, while continuing to ridicule the federal government, Reagan maintained his anti-government stance. Essentially, Reagan was arguing for state and local governments to work to undo a barrier caused by the federal government, in order to allow free enterprise to once again work its magic. In the end, government was not called upon to have a positive effect, but rather to minimize its negative effect.

Politics versus Policy

The impact of the politics versus policy dilemma on Reagan can be considered from two rather distinct perspectives. On one hand, there is some evidence that Reagan was able to overcome the limitations of the politics versus policy dilemma and pursue his preferred policy agenda rather vigorously at first. In 1980, the country was likely particularly susceptible to an optimistic message that promised both lower taxes and an improved economy. After Vietnam, Watergate, and the perceived failures of the Carter administration in terms of the energy crisis and the Iranian hostage situation, Reagan's anti-government message clearly resonated with many Americans. As Stephen Skowronek argued, Reagan was in the strong position of serving as a reconstructive force following the perceived failure of the previous "liberal regime."¹⁵⁹ While that abstract message perhaps garnered support, its enactment—which would require cutting established programs—inherently gave rise to considerable political difficulties. Nonetheless, Reagan was able to pass the 1981 OBRA, helped at least in part by Reagan's ability to take advantage of his election mandate and striking while he still had momentum.

Viewed from a different perspective, however, it seems clear that the tensions inherent to the politics-policy dilemma continued to have an impact. After Reagan's initial success with the 1981 OBRA, his legislative victories were less impressive. Rhetorically, Reagan was clearly put on the defensive, especially regarding the impact of his cuts on the nation's disadvantaged. As this analysis revealed, Reagan was forced to spend considerable energy deflecting the substantial and incessant attacks on both his policies and his character. In the end, the cuts Reagan was able to push through Congress were typically not as drastic as Reagan had initially proposed, and in some cases Congress restored funds to programs that were originally cut in 1981. In sum, advocating policies that many viewed as harming the poor still seemed to be a tough political sell.

In the end, the most significant impact of the Reagan years regarding the politics-policy dilemma concerns the legacy he left rather than how he addressed the tension. Two issues in particular are relevant. The first was Reagan's support for the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Anti-Deficit bill in 1981. The new law had the effect of further complicating the ability of future administrations to pass major reform bills with significant price tags. Nixon's FAP, for example, was a bill with a large initial cost which assumed eventual long term benefits. The anti-deficit legislation made such proposals practically unworkable. Future reform would either have to be attached to a tax raise or to significant reductions in other programs. The additional fact that the bill exempted many of the current welfare programs only served to increase this effect, considering new programs would not necessarily be provided the same exemptions. Simply put, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings bill significantly increased the inherent difficulties of negotiating the politics-policy dilemma.

The second issue involves the manner in which Reagan's cuts were enacted. Many of the cuts involved the tightening of eligibility, which essentially meant the reduction of benefits to those individuals who were not as poor. For example, Reagan's cuts to the school lunch programs primarily involved cutting benefits to families that were at or near middle class level. These were examples of Reagan's rational not needy, people not significantly in need who were nonetheless enjoying the benefits of established government programs originally developed to help the poor. The impact of these cuts, however, ranged beyond simply focusing funds on the "truly needy." For some programs, the exclusion of the less-poor families spelled the demise of the programs in some areas, because the demand was no longer strong enough to maintain the programs. When middle class children were removed from school lunch programs, for example, some school districts had to end the program. Viewed more broadly, the exclusion of the less poor from these programs harmed their political support. The process is similar to how the passage of SSI worked to remove significant numbers of poor perceived to be particularly deserving from the ranks of the "welfare poor," hence making those remaining appear less deserving as a group, thus less politically powerful. After Reagan was able to weather the initial unpopular move of cutting the less poor from these programs, future cuts were made generally less painful politically, as those left in the programs would have even less political influence.

Conclusion

Poverty scholars often point to Ronald Reagan as a villain in terms of his actions toward the nation's poor. For many on the political left, Reagan epitomized the typical conservative intent on helping the rich as the expense of the poor. The point of this chapter, however, was not to attack or defend Reagan, but rather to develop a more nuanced understanding of his perspective concerning welfare and poverty issues as expressed in his rhetoric, in order ultimately to develop a more nuanced understanding of those issues in general. In that spirit, two key points concerning the Reagan years seem to be worth highlighting before closing.

Perhaps the most interesting insight from this analysis was the manner in which Reagan's rhetorical framing of the issues of welfare and poverty worked to nullify the key dilemmas of poverty that have served as the basis of this analysis. By relying on the principles of laissez-faire government, Reagan essentially avoided the tensions created by the freedom-equality, deserving-undeserving, and help-hinder dilemmas. The first two were rendered moot, whereas only one side seemed relevant with the third. In addition, the absence of the tensions caused by these three likely decreased the tension produced by the fourth, the policy-politics dilemma.

Due at least in part to his avoidance of the poverty dilemmas, Reagan was able to tell a simple, seemingly consistent story that clearly resonated with many Americans. Of particular importance was how

Reagan's story was infused with optimism concerning both the future and human nature in general. Gone was the Social Darwinism evident in traditional conservatism which assumed that enduring flaws in human nature inherently refute any possibility of poverty's ultimate eradication. With it went the pessimism that had in some ways held down conservatism. The United States had always been a society infused with optimism. After the 1960s and 1970s challenged that optimism, Reagan came along with a redefined conservatism that recaptured the simple optimism of laissez-faire philosophy. In doing so, Reagan continued to express the idealistic goals of equal opportunity and full employment. Indeed, Reagan framed his economic program in terms of reinvigorating the "American Dream."

The laissez-faire arguments were particularly intoxicating to the nonpoor when applied to poverty and welfare. Inspired in part by the work of Charles Murray on welfare, Reagan was offering an obvious choice. On one side, continue to increase government programs and continue to increase taxes, inflation, and hurt both the poor and the nonpoor. On the other side, cut government programs and thereby decrease taxes, improve the economy, and help the poor and the nonpoor. Reducing welfare in particular would have the effect of not only contributing to an improving economy, but would also release welfare's victims from the dependency trap and mend America's families. With such simple choices, compassionate conservatism clearly had a ready-made audience. Reagan could easily point to over twenty years of pessimistic anti-welfare rhetoric, from Democrats as well as Republicans, to support his arguments. Several recent failures of that government were also fresh on the minds of the American people. Considering the inherent psychological need for the nonpoor to deflect the feeling of guilt concerning the poor, Reagan's story was clearly welcomed by many.

Although Reagan's story was certainly persuasive to particular audiences, it was equally distasteful to others. Johnson, Nixon, and Carter had all expressed concern over welfare's flaws, but each also tended to understand the tensions involved and the need to find balance. For the most part, Reagan's rhetoric did not offer any such balance. As a result, Reagan's simple story seemed less than genuine to those audiences familiar with the complexities of poverty. As evident when his rhetoric is compared to the other presidents in this study, Reagan's story did indeed provide a very limited frame regarding the problems of poverty. Whether Reagan's story was actually genuine or simply politically manufactured is not the issue here, but it does seem possible that the widely disparate reactions to Reagan contributed to the growing polarization in American politics in general and the politics concerning welfare and poverty specifically. Such polarization unfortunately reduces the potential for fruitful public discussion of these issues. In the end, Reagan's image will likely remain split along ideological lines. For many, Reagan is a political icon who captured the simple essential truth about the connections between government, welfare, and poverty. For others, Reagan is a skilled but dangerous demagogue who took advantage of the particular rhetorical situation evident in the 1980s and pushed through policies that helped the powerful at the expense of the weak.

Finally, the importance of Reagan's shift during the final three years is unclear. On one hand, it represented a move away from a strict laissez-faire perspective in its support for government programs and even an expansion of the number of people eligible for and worthy of government benefits. By moving from the sustenance to the rehabilitation model of welfare, Reagan was falling in line with his predecessors. On the other hand, however, Reagan continued to criticize the federal government even while allowing for a more active role for state and local governments. His anti-dependency focus was also primarily concerned with undoing damage done by government programs in the first place. Nonetheless, Reagan's shift away from his simple "government is the problem" perspective and to one that at least called for examining different possible ways to address issues of welfare and poverty must be considered significant, especially when considered alongside his continued support for the progressive ideal of realizing equal opportunity.

Notes

¹ Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America*, 6th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1999), xiv.

² Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 83. See also Joel F. Handler and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, *The Moral Construction of Poverty: Welfare Reform in America* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1991), and Robert Asen, *Visions of Poverty: Welfare Policy and Political Imagination* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2002).

³ Michael Weiler, "The Reagan Attack on Welfare," in *Reagan and Public Discourse in America*, ed. Michael Weiler and W. Barnett Pearce (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992), 228

⁴ James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), viii.

⁵ Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1981* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 110.

⁶ The CETA Youth Jobs program, however, was extended through 1982.

⁷ See *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1981* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1982).

⁸ David Stoesz, and Howard Jacob Karger, "Deconstructing Welfare: The Reagan Legacy and the Welfare State," *Social Work* 38 (1993): 619-28.

⁹ AFDC rolls dropped from 11.1 million in 1981 to 10.4 million in 1982. Food stamps dropped from 22.4 million in 1981 to 22.2 million in 1982. See *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1982* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1983), 469.

¹⁰ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1984* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1985), 11.

¹¹ Interestingly, both Roosevelt and Reagan gave major speeches concerning America's "Economic Bill of Rights." For Roosevelt, economic rights revolved primarily around government insuring economic opportunity. For Reagan, however, economic rights were primarily framed as freedom from

government intervention. See Reagan, "Remarks Announcing America's Economic Bill of Rights," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1987* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), 739-44; and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "Eleventh Annual Address to Congress on January 11, 1944."

¹² Reagan, "Nomination Acceptance Address," in *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*, CD-Rom (Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 2000).

¹³ Reagan, "Inaugural Address," *Public Papers, 1981*, 1.

¹⁴ Reagan, "Remarks at a Dinner Marking the 10th Anniversary of the Heritage Foundation," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1983* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984), 1404; and Reagan, "Remarks at the Mid-Winter Congressional City Conference of the National League of Cities," *Public Papers, 1981*, 178.

¹⁵ James Arnt Aune, *Selling the Free Market: The Rhetoric of Economic Correctness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000), 126.

¹⁶ Kurt Ritter and David Henry, *Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator* (New York : Greenwood Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Reagan, "Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1981*, 126.

¹⁸ Reagan, "Remarks at the Swearing-in Ceremony for Helene A. von Damm as United States Ambassador to Austria," *Public Papers, 1983*, 717.

¹⁹ Consider, for example, Reagan's comments during a White House luncheon in 1981: "The Federal Government's role can be to provide equal opportunity, but the private sector has an even greater potential and a challenging responsibility to provide direct assistance to these institutions." Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Luncheon for Officials of Black Colleges and Universities," *Public Papers, 1981*, 796. Reagan also discussed the "volunteer spirit" during the 1982 State of the Union. See Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1982* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1983), 77.

²⁰ Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1981*, 836.

²¹ Reagan, "Remarks on Private Sector Initiatives at a White House Luncheon for National Religious Leaders," *Public Papers, 1982*, 454. Also see Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Luncheon for Black Clergymen," Reagan, *Public Papers, 1982*, 385.

²² Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union Reagan," *Public Papers, 1982*, 77.

²³ In 1986, for example, Reagan told a group of high school students the following: "We're unique in all the world. 1984, American people voluntarily gave \$74 billion to charitable causes in this country; 1985, they gave \$79.8 billion. It continues to go up." Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students From the Close Up Foundation," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1986* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987), 639. In 1987, Reagan cited Gallup Polls showing volunteerism had reached a 10-year high, and specifically mentioned that "the Gallup Polls have also found that voluntarism to be a particularly American trait, with charitable activity here far outstripping other countries." Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Presentation Ceremony for the President's Volunteer Action Awards," *Public Papers, 1987*, 731. See also Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Voluntarism," *Public Papers, 1987*, 1552.

²⁴ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1981*, 110.

- ²⁵ See, for example, Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 110; Reagan, “Remarks at a Fund-raising Luncheon for Governor Richard L. Thornburgh in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 636; Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1643; Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 58; Reagan, “Remarks at a White House Meeting With Members of the Council for a Black Economic Agenda,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 175.
- ²⁶ Reagan, “White House Report on the Program for Economic Recovery,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 120.
- ²⁷ Reagan, “Interview With Managing Editors on Domestic Issues,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 1120.
- ²⁸ During that session, Reagan said, “We only know how many checks are being mailed out. And this came to light in one case in Chicago when a woman finally was tried who was collecting welfare under 123 different names. And that hasn't been matched far and wide.” Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 91-92.
- ²⁹ Reagan, “Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 228.
- ³⁰ Reagan, “The President's News Conference March 6, 1981,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 208.
- ³¹ Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 91-92.
- ³² On February 9, 1986, for example, Reagan explained that in California they “found that thousands of people who'd gotten the order to report for work never showed up, and we stopped their welfare checks. And we never had a single complaint. And the only thing I can conclude is that some people were collecting under more than one name, and when they had to show up in person, they couldn't do it. And they didn't dare complain then, when we cut off their checks. So, the savings was double.” Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters,” *Public Papers, 1986*, 189.
- ³³ During that speech, Reagan called upon Congress to work “to see how many can be freed from the dependency of welfare and made self-supporting, which the great majority of welfare recipients want more than anything else. Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 59. Later, Reagan would explain, “Most welfare recipients say they want to work, but they also say they can often get more on welfare than they can earn in a full-time job.” See Reagan, “Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Low-Income Opportunity Legislation,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 183.
- ³⁴ See, for example, Reagan, “Remarks in Denver, Colorado, at the Annual Convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 576; Reagan, “Remarks at a National Black Republican Council Dinner,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1166; Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlanta, Georgia,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1115; Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1986*, 128; Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters,” *Public Papers, 1986*, 189; Reagan, “Remarks on Signing the Family Support Act of 1988,” *Public Papers, 1988*, 1329.
- ³⁵ Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the National Alliance of Business,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 882.
- ³⁶ Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the National Alliance of Business,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 882. Reagan said something similar in 1987: “From dealing as a Governor closer at hand with welfare, and those people, I think truly that the bulk of the people on welfare aren't just lazy bums or cheaters—they want nothing more than to be independent, free of the social workers, and out on their own once

again. So, we can help them do that.” Reagan, “Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 118.

- ³⁷ Reagan, “Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 117.
- ³⁸ Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 908.
- ³⁹ Reagan used “greedy” in “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 75; “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 105; and “Message to the Congress Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1984 Budget,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 143. He mentioned people “taking advantage” of programs in “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the Program for Economic Recovery at a White House Luncheon for Congressional Women,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 251; and “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 1035.
- ⁴⁰ For examples of Reagan’s use of the technically but not morally eligible distinction, see “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters at the Fiscal Year 1983 Budget Signing Ceremony,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 120; “Interview With Local Reporters in Bloomington, Minnesota, on Budget Issues and the Federalism Initiative,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 11; “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters at the Fiscal Year 1983 Budget Signing Ceremony,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 120; “Interview With Robert L. Bartley and Albert R. Hunt of the Wall Street Journal on Foreign and Domestic Issues,” *Public Papers, 1984*, 158.
- ⁴¹ In a 1982 interview, for example, Reagan said the following: “No, we’re going to take care of the people who really must be helped and who have real need. What we are trying to do is give those who are administering the programs the freedom to get rid of programs that don’t work or at the same time get rid of people who actually under the technical rules may be eligible but who do not have the need that justifies their being there.” Reagan, “Interview With Local Reporters in Bloomington, Minnesota, on Budget Issues and the Federalism Initiative,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 141.
- ⁴² See, for example, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a Teleconference With Members of the Republican Northeast Regional Leadership Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1339; and “Interview With Robert L. Bartley and Albert R. Hunt of the Wall Street Journal on Foreign and Domestic Issues,” *Public Papers, 1984*, 158.
- ⁴³ Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1984*, 1035; Reagan, “Message to the Congress Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1984 Budget,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 139.
- ⁴⁴ Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 870; and Reagan, “Interview with Jeremiah O’Leary of the Washington Times on Federal Tax and Budget Reconciliation Legislation,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1046.
- ⁴⁵ See, for example, Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 934; and Reagan, “Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Louisville, Kentucky,” *Public Papers, 1984*, 1456.
- ⁴⁶ Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Economic and Fair Housing Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1022.
- ⁴⁷ For two examples of each adjective, see Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery Reagan,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 111; Reagan, “Message to the Congress Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1984 Budget,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 140; Reagan, “Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner Honoring Former Representative John M. Ashbrook in Ashland, Ohio,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 671; Reagan, “Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1990 Budget,” *Public Papers, 1989*, 1693; “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 934; Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session

During a Teleconference With Members of the Republican Northeast Regional Leadership Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1339.

- ⁴⁸ Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1991).
- ⁴⁹ See Reagan, “Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 228; and Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1643.
- ⁵⁰ Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1696.
- ⁵¹ See, for example, Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a Teleconference With Members of the Republican Northeast Regional Leadership Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1339.
- ⁵² During a conference on September 23, 1983, for example, Reagan told those gathered: “we discovered that the way the programs were being administered, there were many people who were receiving help from their fellow citizens who didn’t deserve it because their incomes were as high, and in some instances higher, than many of their fellow citizens who were supporting them through their tax dollars.” Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a Teleconference With Members of the Republican Northeast Regional Leadership Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1339.
- ⁵³ See Reagan, “Remarks on Signing a Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Enterprise Zone Legislation,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 351; and Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Employment Programs,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 339.
- ⁵⁴ Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on the Observance of Labor Day,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1099.
- ⁵⁵ Reagan, “Address to the Nation on the Economy,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1308.
- ⁵⁶ Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on the Congressional Agenda and the Economy,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1436.
- ⁵⁷ Reagan, “Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner Honoring Former Representative John M. Ashbrook in Ashland,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 670.
- ⁵⁸ See, for example, Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Meeting With Employees of AccuRay Corporation in Columbus, Ohio,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1258; Reagan, “Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner for Governor William P. Clements, Jr., in Houston, Texas,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 781; Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Tennessee State Legislature in Nashville,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 304.
- ⁵⁹ See, for example, Reagan, “Remarks at a Meeting with Participants in the American Business Conference,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1223; Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on the Economic Recovery Program,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1414; Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session During a United States Chamber of Commerce Teleconference on Job Training Programs,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1495.
- ⁶⁰ The most extensive example of Reagan explaining his want ad references occurred during a conference in Pittsburgh: “You might have noticed that I always seem to attract attention when I pull out the want ads and talk about unemployment. I’m usually criticized and very often misunderstood or, perhaps I should say misinterpreted. I don’t use the help wanted ads to suggest people are not seriously looking for work. My purpose is to point out that in this time of great unemployment, there are jobs going unfilled for a very definite reason. A couple of Sundays ago I read through the help wanted ads in the Pittsburgh Press, and it’s obvious why so many unemployed are frustrated when they see jobs are available. Like this ad that’s for something called a medical records coder: ‘Position requires an A-R-T

or equivalent experience and knowledge of medical terminology and ICD-9-CM coding.’ [Laughter] Or this one that seeks ‘an achiever in the structured COBOL and/or RPG II.’ But this one from a personnel agency dealing only with computer people illustrates perfectly the point I want to make, so I’ll read you the entire ad: “Systems Programmer-Large Scale IBM, VTAM, TSO/SPF, ACFII, CICS, OS/MVS.” The point is that we’re in a new age. [Laughter] No longer do the ads simply offer jobs with good hours and no heavy lifting. [Laughter] You have to be a specialist to know what the ad is even about. [Laughter] Yes, there are lots of jobs in this paper and in papers all across the country. But the skills needed for the jobs don’t always match the skills of those who need the work. The permanently laid-off steelworker has never had the training even to understand what these want ads mean, let alone to apply for the position. And I can tell you right now, I don’t know what they mean.” See Reagan, “Remarks at the National Conference on the Dislocated Worker in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 504.

- ⁶¹ Reagan, “Remarks at a Kansas Republican Party Fund-raising Luncheon in Topeka,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1127; and Reagan, “Excerpts From an Interview With Walter Cronkite of CBS News,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 200.
- ⁶² Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 92.
- ⁶³ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the Program for Economic Recovery at a White House Luncheon for Congressional Women,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 251.
- ⁶⁴ See Reagan, “Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 227; and Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlanta, Georgia,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1115.
- ⁶⁵ Reagan, “Interview With Julius Hunter of KMOX-TV in St. Louis, Missouri,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 966; and Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Briefing on Federalism for State and Local Officials in Los Angeles, California,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 902.
- ⁶⁶ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters,” *Public Papers, 1986*, 189.
- ⁶⁷ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Student Body of Providence-St. Mel High School in Chicago, Illinois,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 603.
- ⁶⁸ Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlanta, Georgia,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1115; Reagan, “Remarks at a Kansas Republican Party Fund-raising Luncheon in Topeka,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1127; Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 92.
- ⁶⁹ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the Program for Economic Recovery at a White House Luncheon for Congressional Women,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 251.
- ⁷⁰ Reagan, “Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner for Governor James R. Thompson, Jr., in Chicago, Illinois,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 603.
- ⁷¹ Reagan, “Nomination Acceptance Address, July 17, 1980,” *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*.
- ⁷² See, for example, Reagan, “Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner for Governor James R. Thompson, Jr., in Chicago, Illinois,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 603.
- ⁷³ Reagan, “Remarks at the Mid-Winter Congressional City Conference of the National League of Cities,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 178; and Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the United States Jaycees in San Antonio, Texas,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 556.

- ⁷⁴ Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the United States Jaycees in San Antonio, Texas," *Public Papers, 1981*, 556. Reagan discussed similar numbers in a speech the next day. Reagan, "Remarks in Los Angeles at the Luncheon of the Central City and California Taxpayers' Associations," *Public Papers, 1981*, 565.
- ⁷⁵ Reagan, "Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner for Governor James R. Thompson, Jr., in Chicago, Illinois," *Public Papers, 1981*, 603.
- ⁷⁶ Reagan, "Remarks at the New York City Partnership Luncheon in New York," *Public Papers, 1982*, 27.
- ⁷⁷ Reagan, "Remarks at the Legislative Conference of the National Association of Realtors," *Public Papers, 1982*, 389. These exact numbers were repeated in Reagan, "Remarks at the National Legislative Conference of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO," *Public Papers, 1982*, 436.
- ⁷⁸ Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1981*, 832.
- ⁷⁹ Reagan, "Remarks During a White House Briefing for United States Attorneys," *Public Papers, 1985*, 1268.
- ⁸⁰ Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Waste, Fraud, Abuse, and Mismanagement in the Federal Government," *Public Papers, 1984*, 631.
- ⁸¹ For example, Reagan discussed the conclusions of the Grace Commission and its "2,500 recommendations for reducing wasteful spending" during his 1984 State of the Union. See Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1984*, 89. During his 1982 State of the Union, Reagan explained how "Committee after committee of this Congress has heard witness after witness describe many of these programs as poorly administered and rife with waste and fraud." See Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1982*, 75.
- ⁸² Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Tennessee State Legislature in Nashville," *Public Papers, 1982*, 332.
- ⁸³ Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Luncheon for Governor Richard L. Thornburgh in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," *Public Papers, 1982*, 636. See also Reagan, "Remarks at a Kansas Republican Party Fund-raising Luncheon in Topeka," *Public Papers, 1982*, 1127.
- ⁸⁴ See, for example, Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the Program for Economic Recovery at a White House Luncheon for Congressional Women," *Public Papers, 1981*, 251.
- ⁸⁵ Reagan, "Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Gubernatorial Candidate Jim Running in Louisville, Kentucky," *Public Papers, 1983*, 1435. Also see Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Student Body of Providence-St. Mel High School in Chicago, Illinois," *Public Papers, 1982*, 603.
- ⁸⁶ See Reagan, "The President's News Conference," *Public Papers, 1986*, 1084; Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the Members of the Center for the Study of the Presidency," *Public Papers, 1988*, 386; Reagan, "Remarks and an Interview With Gannett Foundation Fellows," *Public Papers, 1988*, 401.
- ⁸⁷ Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With a Group of Out-of-Town Editors," *Public Papers, 1981*, 895.
- ⁸⁸ Reagan, "Remarks at the Mid-Winter Congressional City Conference of the National League of Cities," *Public Papers, 1981*, 177.

- ⁸⁹ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1981*, 75. Reagan made a similar claim in May of 1982, when he explained that the food stamp program "is the one Federal program whose abuses Americans have personally seen on a weekly basis at the checkout counters of their supermarkets." See Reagan, "Remarks at the Republican Congressional 'Salute to President Ronald Reagan Dinner,'" *Public Papers, 1982*, 556.
- ⁹⁰ Reagan, "Remarks at the Republican Congressional 'Salute to President Ronald Reagan Dinner,'" *Public Papers, 1982*, 556.
- ⁹¹ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1983*, 105. Also see "Message to the Congress Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1984 Budget," *Public Papers, 1983*, 143.
- ⁹² Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1981*, 834.
- ⁹³ See, for example, Reagan, "Remarks at a Fundraising Luncheon for Gubernatorial Candidate Jim Running in Louisville, Kentucky," *Public Papers, 1983*, 1435; and Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1986*, 215. Reagan made similar comments at least six more times in 1987 and 1988.
- ⁹⁴ Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner Honoring Former Representative John M. Ashbrook in Ashland, Ohio," *Public Papers, 1983*, 671. Reagan also specifically discussed Murray's work in Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 117.
- ⁹⁵ See, for example, Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 215; Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1988*, 87; Reagan, "Remarks to State and Local Republican Officials on Federalism and Aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance," *Public Papers, 1988*, 364; and Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Dinner of the Knights of Malta in New York, New York," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1734.
- ⁹⁶ Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner Honoring Former Representative John M. Ashbrook in Ashland, Ohio," *Public Papers, 1983*, 671.
- ⁹⁷ Reagan, "Remarks at a National Black Republican Council Dinner," *Public Papers, 1982*, 1166.
- ⁹⁸ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1985*, 132.
- ⁹⁹ Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the American Bar Association in Atlanta, Georgia," *Public Papers, 1983*, 1115. Also see Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on the American Family," *Public Papers, 1983*, 1648.
- ¹⁰⁰ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1986*, 128.
- ¹⁰¹ Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 117.
- ¹⁰² Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 908.
- ¹⁰³ For his remarks concerning "emancipation," see Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1986*, 128; Reagan, "Message to the Congress on America's Agenda for the Future," *Public Papers, 1986*, 154; Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters," 186; and Reagan, "Remarks on Signing the Family Support Act of 1988," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1329.
- ¹⁰⁴ Reagan discusses the report in Reagan, "Message to the Congress on 'A Quest for Excellence,'" *Public Papers, 1987*, 71.

- ¹⁰⁵ Reagan, "America's Economic Bill of Rights," *Public Papers, 1987*, 745.
- ¹⁰⁶ Reagan discussed the poverty trap in a number of addresses, including Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1987*, 58; Reagan, "Message to the Congress on 'A Quest for Excellence,'" *Public Papers, 1987*, 71; Reagan, "Letter to the Nation's Governors on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 112; Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 113; Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 117; Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Meeting With Members of the Council for a Black Economic Agenda," *Public Papers, 1987*, 174.
- ¹⁰⁷ Reagan, "Remarks to State and Local Republican Officials on Federalism and Aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Resistance," *Public Papers, 1988*, 364.
- ¹⁰⁸ The extended discussion in full was: "Today I'd like to speak to you about a gathering crisis in our society: It's a family crisis. To some it's hidden, concealed behind tenement walls or lost in the forgotten streets of our inner cities. But for millions of Americans, the crisis is ever present and growing, and it threatens to become a permanent scar on the American promise of hope and opportunity for all. I'm talking about the crisis of family breakdowns, especially among the welfare poor, both black and white. In inner cities today, families, as we've always thought of them, are not even being formed. Since 1960 the percentage of babies born out of wedlock has more than doubled. And too often their mothers are only teenagers. They're children—many of them 15, 16, and 17 years old with all the responsibilities of grownups thrust upon them. The fathers of these children are often nowhere to be found. In some instances you have to go back three generations before you can find an intact family. It seems even the memory of families is in danger of becoming extinct. And what of the babies born out of wedlock, these children born to children. . . . We're in danger of creating a permanent culture of poverty as inescapable as any chain or bond; a second and separate America, an America of lost dreams and stunted lives. The irony is that misguided welfare programs instituted in the name of compassion have actually helped turn a shrinking problem into a national tragedy. From the 1950's on, poverty in America was declining. American society, an opportunity society, was doing its wonders. Economic growth was providing a ladder for millions to climb up out of poverty and into prosperity. In 1964 the famous War on Poverty was declared and a funny thing happened. Poverty, as measured by dependency, stopped shrinking and then actually began to grow worse. I guess you could say, poverty won the war. Poverty won in part because instead of helping the poor, government programs ruptured the bonds holding poor families together. Perhaps the most insidious effect of welfare is its usurpation of the role of provider. In States where payments are highest, for instance, public assistance for a single mother can amount to much more than the usable income of a minimum wage job. In other words, it can pay for her to quit work. Many families are eligible for substantially higher benefits when the father is not present. What must it do to a man to know that his own children will be better off if he is never legally recognized as their father? Under existing welfare rules, a teenage girl who becomes pregnant can make herself eligible for welfare benefits that will set her up in an apartment of her own, provide medical care, and feed and clothe her. She only has to fulfill one condition—not marry or identify the father. Obviously something is desperately wrong with our welfare system." See Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1986*, 214.
- ¹⁰⁹ Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Briefing for Supporters of Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 118.
- ¹¹⁰ See, for example, Reagan, "Message to the Congress on 'A Quest for Excellence,'" *Public Papers, 1987*, 71; Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 113; Reagan, "Remarks at the Conservative Political Action Conference Luncheon," *Public Papers, 1987*, 167; Reagan, "Remarks to Members of the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers, 1988*, 238.

- ¹¹¹ See, for example, Reagan, “Remarks at a White House Meeting With Members of the Council for a Black Economic Agenda,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 174; Reagan, “Letter to the Nation’s Governors on Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 112; and Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on the Economy and Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1988*, 1119.
- ¹¹² Reagan, “Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 114.
- ¹¹³ See Reagan, “Message to the Congress on ‘A Quest for Excellence,’” *Public Papers, 1987*, 71. Reagan quoted Friedman in a number of addresses, including Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 189; Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters,” *Public Papers, 1986*, 189; and Reagan, “Question-and-Answer Session With High School Students on Domestic and Foreign Policy Issues,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 91.
- ¹¹⁴ Reagan, for example, argued that “work is the only genuine path to self-respect and independence” in Reagan, “Remarks and a Panel Discussion With Community Leaders on Welfare Reform,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 130; and Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the National Alliance of Business,” *Public Papers, 1987*, 1032.
- ¹¹⁵ B.L. Ware and Wil Linkugel, “They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 278.
- ¹¹⁶ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session via Satellite to Republican Campaign Events,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1340; Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1983*, 1732.
- ¹¹⁷ Reagan, “Remarks at a Kansas Republican Party Fund-raising Luncheon in Topeka,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 1127.
- ¹¹⁸ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the Program for Economic Recovery at a White House Luncheon for Congressional Women,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 251.
- ¹¹⁹ Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 37.
- ¹²⁰ Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Fund-raising Reception for Senator John Heinz in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 639. For additional examples, see Reagan, “The President’s News Conference,” *Public Papers, 1988*, 1607; and Reagan, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Reporters at the Fiscal Year 1983 Budget Signing Ceremony,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 119. Interestingly, during his 1984 debate with Walter Mondale, Reagan made a similar argument concerning the “increases” in poverty, although his explanation seemed a bit unclear: “Yes, there has been an increase in poverty, but it is a lower rate of increase than it was in the preceding years before we got here. It has begun to decline, but it is still going up.” See Reagan, “Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Mondale in Louisville, Kentucky,” *Public Papers, 1984*, 1456.
- ¹²¹ Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery,” *Public Papers, 1981*, 109.
- ¹²² Reagan, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 74.
- ¹²³ For examples of Reagan’s “95 million meals” claims, see Reagan, “Message to the Congress Transmitting the Fiscal Year 1983 Budget,” *Public Papers, 1982*; 129; Reagan, “Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 227; Reagan, “Remarks at the Legislative Conference of the National Association of Realtors,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 389.
- ¹²⁴ Reagan, “Remarks at a Rally for United States Senator David Durenberger in Bloomington, Minnesota,” *Public Papers, 1982*, 137.

- ¹²⁵ Reagan, "Remarks at a Conservative Political Action Conference Dinner," *Public Papers, 1982*, 227.
- ¹²⁶ Reagan, "Remarks at the Legislative Conference of the National Association of Realtors," *Public Papers, 1982*, 389.
- ¹²⁷ For "misinformation," see Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the Program for Economic Recovery at a Breakfast for Newspaper and Television News Editors," *Public Papers, 1981*, 134; Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1981*, 834. For "demagoguery," see Reagan, "Remarks at the 1981 White House Conference on Aging," *Public Papers, 1981*, 1101; Reagan, "Statement Announcing the Establishment of the National Commission on Social Security Reform," *Public Papers, 1981*, 1157; and Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner for Governor William P. Clements, Jr., in Houston, Texas," *Public Papers, 1982*, 781. For "insistent drumbeats," see Reagan, "Interview With Robert L. Bartley and Albert R. Hunt of the Wall Street Journal on Foreign and Domestic Issues," *Public Papers, 1984*, 158; Reagan, "Address to the Nation on the Fiscal Year 1983 Federal Budget," *Public Papers, 1982*, 533. For "falsehoods," see Reagan, "Remarks at the 1981 White House Conference on Aging," *Public Papers, 1981*, 1101; Reagan, "Statement Announcing the Establishment of the National Commission on Social Security Reform," *Public Papers, 1981*, 1157. For "wild charges," see Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1982*, 74. For "propaganda," see Reagan, "The President's News Conference," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1607; and Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Luncheon for Governor Richard L. Thornburgh in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," *Public Papers, 1982*, 636.
- ¹²⁸ William L. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).
- ¹²⁹ See, for example, Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Economic and Fair Housing Issues," *Public Papers, 1982*, 1022; and Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the United States Chamber of Commerce," *Public Papers, 1982*, 516.
- ¹³⁰ See Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Dinner Honoring Former Representative John M. Ashbrook in Ashland, Ohio," *Public Papers, 1983*, 671; and Reagan, "Remarks at a Fund-raising Luncheon for Governor Richard L. Thornburgh in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," *Public Papers, 1982*, 636.
- ¹³¹ Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the Economic Club of Detroit in Detroit, Michigan," *Public Papers, 1984*, 1397.
- ¹³² Reagan labeled anti-inflation his "greatest success" in Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers, 1982*, 422; he labeled it the "greatest program for the poor" in Reagan, "Remarks to the National Catholic Education Association in Chicago, Illinois," *Public Papers, 1982*, 469; and "the greatest thing we have done for the poor" Reagan, "Interview With Julius Hunter of KMOX-TV in St. Louis, Missouri," *Public Papers, 1982*, 966.
- ¹³³ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1986*, 128.
- ¹³⁴ Reagan called for welfare to be "reshaped" in Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1986*, 215; he used the phrase "major new national strategy" in Reagan, "Message to the Congress on 'A Quest for Excellence,'" *Public Papers, 1986*, 71.
- ¹³⁵ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1988*, 87.
- ¹³⁶ See, for example, Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters," *Public Papers, 1986*, 189; Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1986*, 215; Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 909.

- ¹³⁷ Reagan, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With Regional Editors and Broadcasters," *Public Papers, 1986*, 189; and Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Meeting With Members of the Council for a Black Economic Agenda," *Public Papers, 1987*, 175.
- ¹³⁸ Reagan, "Message to the Congress on "A Quest for Excellence," *Public Papers, 1987*, 71.
- ¹³⁹ Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 908.
- ¹⁴⁰ Reagan, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the National Governors' Association in Cincinnati, Ohio," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1040.
- ¹⁴¹ Reagan, "Remarks on Signing the Family Support Act of 1988," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1329..
- ¹⁴² See, for example, Reagan, "1988 Legislative and Administrative Message: A Union of Individuals, January 25, 1988, RR, 1988, p.106; and Reagan, "Remarks at a Republican Party Fundraising Dinner in Houston, Texas," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1203.
- ¹⁴³ Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 909.
- ¹⁴⁴ Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on the Economy and Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1119.
- ¹⁴⁵ Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on the Federal Budget, September 9, 1988," *Public Papers, 1988*, 1261.
- ¹⁴⁶ Remarks at a Republican Party Fundraising Dinner in Houston, Texas, September 22, 1988, *Public Papers, 1988*, 1203.
- ¹⁴⁷ Reagan, "Message to the Congress on 'A Quest for Excellence,'" *Public Papers, 1984*, 71.
- ¹⁴⁸ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1987*, 59.
- ¹⁴⁹ Reagan, "Remarks and a Panel Discussion With Community Leaders on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 129.
- ¹⁵⁰ Reagan, "Remarks to Members of the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers, 1987*, 171.
- ¹⁵¹ Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers, 1987*, 908.
- ¹⁵² Reagan, "Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Low-Income Opportunity Legislation," *Public Papers, 1987*, 183.
- ¹⁵³ Reagan, "1988 Legislative and Administrative Message: A Union of Individuals," *Public Papers, 1988*, 106.
- ¹⁵⁴ Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers, 1988*, 87.
- ¹⁵⁵ Reagan, "Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Low-Income Opportunity Legislation," *Public Papers, 1987*, 183.
- ¹⁵⁶ Reagan, "Remarks to Members of the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers, 1987*, 171.
- ¹⁵⁷ Reagan, "Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Low-Income Opportunity Legislation," *Public Papers, 1987*, 182.
- ¹⁵⁸ Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Briefing for Members of the American Legislative Exchange Council," *Public Papers, 1987*, 447.
- ¹⁵⁹ Stephen Skowronek, *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to Bill Clinton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1997), 421-22.

CHAPTER VI

BILL CLINTON AND THE END OF WELFARE AS WE KNEW IT

On August 22, 1996, with the presidential election looming, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 at a ceremony in the Rose Garden.¹ The bill fulfilled Clinton's 1991 campaign promise to "end welfare as we know it" by eliminating a sixty-one year federal entitlement born in Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, replacing it with time limits, work requirements, and block grants in control of the states.² The bill, considered the "biggest shift in social policy since the Depression" and "a watershed defeat for liberalism" was designed to help balance the budget by saving \$55 billion in federal expenditures, but was also estimated at the time to result in 1.1 million more children under the poverty line.³ The response from Clinton's traditional liberal allies was intense. The bill was labeled a "cruel monstrosity," "a moment of shame," "an unconscionable retreat," and "legislative child abuse."⁴ Representative John Lewis called the bill "downright lowdown. What good does it profit for a great nation to conquer the world, only to lose its soul?" Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a respected social policy scholar widely considered the most intellectual member of the Senate, was perhaps the most incensed, arguing that the "premise of this legislation is that the behavior of certain adults can be changed by making the lives of their children as wretched as possible."⁵ Several high ranking officials quit the Clinton administration, included noted poverty scholars Mary Jo Bane and David Ellwood.

Reports of the inner White House discussions reveal an intense rift concerning the bill. Most of Clinton's policy advisors including Secretary of Labor Robert Reich and Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala, were adamantly against signing the bill.⁶ Pushing for Clinton to sign, on the other hand, were his political advisors, led by "chief strategist" Dick Morris and New Democrat domestic advisor Bruce Reed, along with vice-president Al Gore. Morris had flatly advised the president that a third welfare veto would transform his "fifteen point win into a three point loss" and cost him the election. He recalled telling the president, "What good will you do if you lose? If you veto the bill and lose, what will the Republicans do then to the very people you want to help?"⁷ When the decision was finally made and Clinton announced his intention to sign, Morris reportedly exulted to a friend, "That's it. The election is over."⁸ Clinton was subsequently re-elected by a comfortable margin in the 1996 election.

Overall, Clinton's rhetoric and actions concerning welfare reform reveal a fascinating political story. Welfare reform was a key policy area for Clinton to demonstrate his "New Democratic" philosophy. During the 1992 campaign and on through the announcement of his welfare proposal in 1994, Clinton sought to end welfare by replacing it with work through the use of sticks (work requirements, time limits, and conditions concerning teenage pregnancies and out of wedlock births) and carrots (with the expansion

of several costly programs tied to job training, public employment, child care, health care, and more). During this time, Clinton also criticized welfare strongly, placing much blame on the outdated system, while he attempted to rehabilitate parts of the negative stereotype of the welfare recipient and glorify the efforts of the working poor. Once the Republicans took over Congress after the 1994 elections and began developing their own welfare proposals with a significantly altered ratio of sticks to carrots, Clinton slowly retreated from his earlier positions, and eventually agreed to sign a bill that included many of the punitive measures from Clinton's original proposal, but lacked much of the additional spending to help make work a more attractive and viable option for welfare recipients. In his speech celebrating the signing of the legislation, Clinton justified his signature by explaining how the bill would transform the nature of anti-poverty. While Clinton's retreat was significant and is widely considered a policy defeat for the political left, the progressive blueprint he laid out during the signing ceremony must not be dismissed, as it reveals a potential path for to push an agenda to provide significant assistance to the nation's poor within the new rhetorical climate created by the 1996 welfare bill.

In this chapter, I examine Clinton's rhetoric concerning poverty and welfare reform from the 1992 presidential election up until the signing of the influential welfare bill in August of 1996. The chapter begins with a historical review of Clinton's first four years. I then turn to Clinton's rhetoric from 1992-1996. Following the pattern from the earlier chapters, I examine how he expressed his political philosophy as it related to the issue of poverty, how he depicted relevant characters, how he addressed the current welfare system, and how he framed and responded to proposals for reform. Then, due to its importance, I focus specifically on the address Clinton gave when signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996. I conclude by examining Clinton's rhetoric through the lens of the four poverty dilemmas.

Clinton's Record

As the governor of Arkansas, Clinton was a key player within the National Governors' Association push for the 1998 welfare bill, the Family Support Act, that Reagan signed shortly before leaving office. That bill hoped to further the transition of welfare from its traditional sustenance frame to one with more of a focus on work. The bill required states to operate Job Opportunity and Basic Skills programs (JOBS), and required at least one parent of two-parent welfare families to work or be involved in training programs. While the bill did provide some funding for such programs, the economic recession significantly undermined its impact as welfare rolls soon began to skyrocket. From 1989 to 1992, the number of families on AFDC rose 25 percent to 4.76 million, representing 13.6 million people. At the beginning of the 1992 campaign, one in seven children in the United States was on welfare.⁹

In this context, Bill Clinton initiated what would become a remarkable welfare odyssey during a 1991 campaign speech at Georgetown University, where he explained that under his philosophy of the “New Covenant,” he would tell people on welfare that while they would be given “training and education and health care for yourself and your children,” he would instill the principle that “if you can work you must go to work because we can no longer afford to have you stay on welfare forever.”¹⁰ Such a tradeoff became the cornerstone of his promise to “end welfare as we know it” during the 1992 campaign. The claim was repeated often throughout the campaign, including during the presidential debates and in his nomination acceptance address, and was considered by Jeffrey Katz of *Congressional Quarterly* a “key plank in his successful effort to gain support from middle class and suburban voters.”¹¹

Once elected, however, Clinton sought to avoid the issue at first, in part due to the decision within the administration to focus first upon health care reform. Providing universal health care would have removed one of the key barriers to moving people from welfare to work, due to the fact that the welfare poor received Medicaid but the working poor did not. As a result, welfare reform would have been much easier to accomplish if universal health care existed. Since Clinton chose to focus on health care first, welfare reform was hardly an issue in 1993. The Republicans did offer their own plan on November 10 which was co-sponsored by 160 of the 175 House Republicans, but it did not progress far. The key relevant legislation of 1993 was a significant increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which was part of Clinton’s Budget Reconciliation Act that was passed when Vice President Gore cast the tiebreaking vote in the Senate. The increase was an important move for Clinton’s welfare to work philosophy, as it increased the value of low-wage work.

After health care floundered, not even coming to a vote in either chamber of Congress, Clinton finally introduced his own welfare plan in an address in July of 1994. The Clinton plan had a price tag of an additional \$9.3 billion over its first five years. That plan was also never voted on by Congress, as the Republicans had turned their focus to the 1994 elections where they sought to co-opt Clinton’s call for welfare reform, pledging “truly to ‘end welfare as we know it’” in the *Contract with America*.¹² After the Republican takeover of Congress in those elections ended 40 years of Democratic control, Congress, according to *Congressional Quarterly*, was “populated by a new cadre of lawmakers more intensely anti-government than any other in contemporary times.”¹³ Even before the new Congress convened, however, two welfare reform bills were sent to Clinton. The first was within a deficit-reducing budget reconciliation bill in late 1994, and then one on its own early in 1995. Relying heavily on block grants over entitlements, requiring work, and punishing teen pregnancy and out of wedlock births, the first bill was designed to save \$81.5 billion over seven years, while the stand alone bill was projected to save \$64.1 billion over seven years. Clinton vetoed both, but was criticized by his party for not speaking out more forcefully against what were considered “draconian” bills.¹⁴

By 1996, the Republican euphoria from the 1994 elections had subsided somewhat, in part due to the budget fiasco that ultimately led to the shutdown of the government which was predominately blamed on the Republicans, rather than the Clinton White House. Leading up to the 1996 presidential election, the GOP was reportedly split between only sending Clinton welfare bills he would surely veto, in order to attack him for not fulfilling his campaign promise, or to call his bluff and send him a borderline bill that was still tough on welfare recipients but would fit Clinton's criteria enough to earn his signature. For most of the year, the bills working through Congress included the "poison pill" of Medicaid cuts that Clinton clearly had indicated would warrant vetoes. In early June, however, with the blessing of Bob Dole, Congress split the Medicaid and welfare bills. The welfare bill passed the House on July 18th and then the Senate on July 23rd. On July 31, Clinton announced he would sign the bill. Later that day, the House adopted the conference agreement 328-101, and the Senate did so the following day 78-21. Republicans in both branches were unanimous in their support. In between Clinton's commitment to sign the bill and the actual signing ceremony, Clinton signed the Small Business Job Protection Act of 1996, which included a two-stage increase in the minimum wage. That increase, along with the expansion of EITC in 1994, significantly improved the income of the working poor. Two days after that, on August 22, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) at a ceremony in the Rose Garden.

The bill was considered by many as the most significant social policy legislation since the New Deal. Most importantly, it removed the federal entitlement to benefits for the nation's poor—support was no longer guaranteed, even to poor children—and added work requirements and restrictions to long-term aid. AFDC was replaced by TANF, Temporary Aid for Needy Families, which would be administered through block grants to the states. States would now have increased flexibility on how they could use the money, including wide discretion in determining eligibility. Funding for the block grants would be set for each state at the level of AFDC funding for fiscal 1995, 1994, or the average of 1992-1994, whichever was the highest. Adults receiving aid would be required to work within two years, and only parents with children under the age of 1 were exempt. A five-year lifetime cap of receipt was also included. By 2002, states were expected to have fifty percent of their welfare caseload working or risk having their allotment reduced up to 21 percent. The bill also toughened eligibility to Supplemental Security Income, increased measures to insure the collection of more child support, scaled back the food stamp program, added some restrictions to EITC, and cut programs for immigrants. All in all, the program was estimated to save \$54.1 billion over six years. Some controversial measures in the original Republican bills were removed as requirements, but remained as options states could implement, such as denying aid to new children born to welfare recipients and denying aid to unmarried parents under 18.¹⁵

One last relevant point is necessary. While the various welfare reform bills were making their way through Congress, Clinton was also busy actively encouraging and freely authorizing individual states

to submit waivers that would allow them temporary flexibility to develop their own programs outside of the current federal rules. By the time Clinton signed the welfare bill, in fact, forty-one states were actually working in part under different rules due to these waivers. Many of these state experiments used similar measures that were included in the 1996 bill, including work requirements, tougher child support measures, and the withholding of support for unmarried parents who move out of their parent's home and drop out of school. Thus while the change the PRWORA brought about was certainly dramatic in terms of federal law, the actual change in services was somewhat less dramatic.

Clinton's Philosophy: The New Covenant

In May of 1985, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) was formed by a group of southern and western Democratic Party officials who were concerned with the leadership of the Democratic National Committee and the growing popular disillusionment of "New Left" Democratic politics.¹⁶ To many in the DLC, the easy Republican victory in the 1988 presidential election demonstrated that "Democratic liberalism was bankrupt nationally,"¹⁷ and that a philosophical redefinition of the party and its view of government was necessary. In 1991, a young, energetic governor from the state of Arkansas delivered the keynote address during the DLC convention in Cleveland, Ohio, as part of his bid for the democratic presidential nomination. During that speech, Clinton explained the "new choice Democrats can ride to victory on," based on "opportunity, responsibility, choice, a government that works, a belief in community." Clinton situated the new perspective apart from the two traditional choices: "Now our new choice plainly rejects the old categories and the false alternatives they impose. Is what I just said to you liberal or conservative? The truth is, it is both, and it is different. It rejects the Republicans' attacks and the Democrats' previous unwillingness to consider new alternatives."¹⁸

At the center of Clinton's New Covenant philosophy was the oft-repeated "contract" promising *opportunity* in return for *responsibility*. The reciprocal relationship between these two values, which was also referred to variously as the "social contract," a "social compact," and as "America's basic bargain," was critical to the New Democrats' attempts to reframe the Democratic party while still remaining true to some of its core beliefs. The stress on responsibility was a key vehicle designed to attack the perception that had developed accusing the Democrats of encouraging an "entitlement culture" that was not sufficiently concerned with a lack of individual responsibility. Pertinent to welfare politics, the Democrats were perceived by many as rewarding idleness over work, and being unconcerned with moral issues such as teenage pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births. As explained by Kenneth Baer, the New Democrats placed considerable emphasis on replacing the "politics of entitlement" with the "politics of reciprocal responsibility."¹⁹ Thus, while the call to "demand" responsibility was designed to work against the Democrat's growing negative stereotype, the corresponding promise of opportunity represented a more

traditional Democratic appeal. Through this connection, Clinton and the New Democrats attempted to present a revitalized form of “progressive” government that would serve as a “partner” to the American people.

Clinton often linked his New Covenant *topoi* rhetorically to America’s Founding Fathers and to Franklin Delano Roosevelt. During his 1991 Georgetown address, for example, Clinton said, “More than 200 years ago, our founding fathers outlined our first social compact between government and the people, not just between lords and kings. More than 100 years ago, Abraham Lincoln gave his life to maintain the union that compact created. More than 60 years ago Franklin Roosevelt renewed that promise with a New Deal that offered opportunity in return for hard work.” Later in the speech, he specifically invoked FDR’s words:

Nearly 60 years ago, in a very famous speech to the Commonwealth Club, in the final months of his 1932 campaign, President Franklin Roosevelt outlined a new compact that gave hope to a nation mired in the Great Depression. The role of government, he said, was to promise every American the right to make a living. The people's role was to do their best to make the most of that opportunity. He said, and I quote, ‘Faith in America demands that we recognize the new terms of the old social contract.’ In the strength of great hope, we must all shoulder the common load. That's what our hope is today, a new covenant to shoulder the common load.²⁰

The choice of Roosevelt as a model was symbolic of the New Democrats’ rejection of the big government liberalism of the Lyndon Johnson era and the New Politics liberalism of McGovern, Mondale, or Jesse Jackson. In this sense, the “New” Democrats were in many ways a reincarnation of “old” Democrats of the Roosevelt era.

The reciprocity theme was central to Clinton’s 1992 campaign. During his 1992 nomination acceptance address, for example, Clinton said:

I call this approach a New Covenant, a solemn agreement between the people and their government, based not simply on what each of us can take, but what all of us must give to our nation. We offer our people a new choice based on old values. We offer opportunity. We demand responsibility. We will build an American community again. The choice we offer is not conservative or liberal; in many ways it's not even Republican or Democratic. It's different. It's new. And it will work.²¹

Important to this study, the new social contract worked to deflate attacks that the Democratic party favored “handouts” over work. In his first inaugural, for example, Clinton told the audience that “We must do what America does best: offer more opportunity to all and demand responsibility from all. It is time to break the bad habit of expecting something for nothing, from our government or from each other.”²² In his 1994 State of the Union, Clinton applied the social contract rhetoric directly to welfare reform, saying, “to all

those who depend on welfare, we should offer ultimately a simple compact. We'll provide the support, the job training, the child care you need for up to two years. But after that, anyone who can work must."²³ As will be shown when Clinton's rhetoric concerning his own proposals is examined below, the responsibility/opportunity trade off was included in practically every speech mentioning welfare reform.

Whereas the argument based on responsibility focused on attacking the entitlement mentality, and was often seen as a thinly veiled attack on unwed mothers and deadbeat parents, it was nonetheless balanced with the other side of the contract: opportunity. Clinton constantly returned to the need for government, business, and fellow citizens to provide opportunity to those that fulfilled their obligation of responsibility. The primary rhetorical vehicle for this call revolved around the concept of "investment," a strategic term that was likely inspired by Robert Reich's work in which he argued that in the new economy, a nation's people were their most important commodity, and investment in providing them the necessary education and re-training was critical.²⁴ Investment connotes short-term costs for greater long-term benefits, and works against the idea of "handouts," long-term dependency, or the simple redistribution of wealth. Clinton and Gore's *Putting People First*, their 1992 campaign booklet, relied heavily on the rhetoric of public investment.

Within this reciprocal framework, Clinton provided his own particular version of the American Dream. Clinton explained often that he ran for president in order to "restore" the American Dream. When criticizing economic realities and the gap between the real and the ideal of the American Dream, Clinton did not attack the prevalence of poverty and inequality, as did Johnson, but rather the struggles of the middle class, which he argued had been "working harder and harder for stagnant wages."²⁵ This rhetorical choice was an interesting one. From one perspective, it represented a shift to the right, and opened Clinton up to criticism from his political left that accused him of abandoning the party's traditional concern for the disadvantaged. The New Democrats, however, would argue that the party had to improve its appeal to the middle class, and, by doing so, would be more able in the long run to help its traditional constituencies. This shift would be consistent with Clinton's strategy of drawing the focus away from the controversial images of the welfare or minority poor, and toward the more popular images of the working poor, to which he essentially added the struggling middle class. Indeed, Clinton's message was often that more and more of the traditional American middle class was falling back into poverty, despite their hard work and "responsible" character.

Throughout his first four years, Clinton, perhaps more than any of the other presidents examined in this study, attempted to provide a concrete interpretation of the abstract promise of the "American Dream." Often in conjunction with his calls for an expanded Earned Income Tax Credit or an increase in the minimum wage, Clinton often cited the principle that if a family with children has a full time worker, they should not be in poverty.²⁶ This principle was essentially a promise that if individuals worked hard, the government had a responsibility to insure that work was rewarded. It was thus inherently endowed

with the responsibility/opportunity tradeoff, justifying significant government action but only if individuals exhibit responsible behavior.

The question of whether or not the New Democrat philosophy was primarily a political maneuver or a sincere shift in ideology is unclear, but regardless, Clinton was rather consistent in its expression and application. Its core—the balancing of opportunity and responsibility—inherently applied directly to welfare reform and Clinton’s related goal of “making work pay.” The philosophy allowed Clinton great flexibility in calling for policies that fit either side of the American political scene, but also opened him up to charges by both sides that he was inconsistent and unprincipled.

Clinton’s Depictions of Poverty

In discussing poverty and welfare reform, Clinton typically focused on four primary characters. His key character was the welfare mother, a complicated image for Clinton that itself represented a balancing act between conservative and liberal assumptions. According to Clinton, welfare mothers were at least partly to blame for their situations due to past behavior, but were nonetheless sympathetic figures endowed with potential and hopefulness. Clinton joined his qualified defense of the welfare mother with two other powerful and counterbalanced images: attacks on the “deadbeat dad” and defenses of the children in poverty. Each in part worked alternatively to blame and defend the welfare mother for her situation. Lastly, Clinton often presented depictions of the economically struggling “working family.” This final depiction differed from the others in that it represented both a goal for welfare recipients to reach as well a critical area for legislators to act on, especially in terms of “rewarding work” in order to help facilitate the process of moving families off welfare and onto meaningful and sustaining work.

The Welfare Mother

Of Clinton’s four primary depictions, the image of the welfare mother was the most complex. As governor of Arkansas and a key contributor to the deliberations concerning the 1988 Family Support Act, Clinton had developed considerable expertise concerning welfare and its related policy areas. Clinton exclaimed often that he had spent more time with welfare recipients than any other “elected official,” and was likely the only president ever to spend significant time in welfare offices speaking to them and their case workers.²⁷ In practically every speech on the subject, Clinton would specifically establish his expertise concerning welfare, and profess to be able to speak for welfare recipients and to hold a particularly adept understanding of their situation.

Primarily, Clinton’s rhetorical efforts in this area consisted of attempting to partially rehabilitate the image of the welfare mother. Clearly the public image of the welfare recipient was a negative one,

evidenced by polling data and attribution research by social psychologists.²⁸ In defense of the welfare recipient, Clinton provided alternative and understandable explanations of their reasons for being on welfare, and consistently argued that they possessed the same values and goals as all Americans, including a hatred of welfare and belief in the importance of work and family. Although these arguments worked against the dominate negative conception of the welfare recipient, Clinton would also at times implicitly accuse the welfare recipients of irresponsible behavior, especially in terms of having children out of wedlock. Clinton would, however, explicitly place such behavior in the past, asking audiences not to judge them on the “mistakes” or “sins” of their past.

An important Clinton tactic in the defense of the welfare recipient was to redefine the assumed motives behind the receipt of welfare away from laziness or a desire to have “something for nothing” to the regretful but understandable decisions of women put it awkward and unfair positions. Playing off his extended experience interacting with welfare recipients, Clinton would often attempt to explain the predicament faced by poor mothers. During his 1992 campaign, for example, Clinton explained that while it was clear the solution to the welfare problem was to put people to work, taking that step was not as easy as many assumed:

I’m for making people on welfare go to work, but you’ve got to understand why they don’t. Most people who are trapped on welfare and don’t go to work don’t do it because they have no education, they have no skills. If they went on to work, they’d get a minimum-wage job, they couldn’t afford child care and they’d give up the Medicaid coverage which gives their children medical benefits. Nobody in their right mind hurts their kids.²⁹

On other occasions, Clinton would specifically dismiss the notion that welfare recipients remained on welfare because of the “welfare check,” but rather because of the cost of child care and medical coverage if they left welfare.³⁰ The welfare check, he explained in July 1993, was “no longer an incentive to stay on welfare...what keeps people on welfare is the cost of health care and child care for their kids and the inability to get a good job because of a lack of education and training.”³¹ In February 1994, he argued that the welfare check “has almost nothing to do with why people stay on welfare.”³² He would further explain how the value of the checks, in “real dollar terms” or “real value” was lower than 20 years before.³³ Clinton bolstered these claims by referring often to welfare as a “trap,” calling for the “liberation” of welfare recipients from the “shackles” of welfare.³⁴ Such comments again worked to establish an environmental rather than dispositional attribution to welfare receipt.

From February to June 1994, the time period in which health care reform was being debated, Clinton continued along a similar line of argument, while shifting his focus more intensely upon the link between welfare receipt and health care. In at least fifteen different occasions during those five months, Clinton attacked the policy that removed health care once welfare recipients began to work. Calling the

system “crazy,” “unfair,” “perverse,” and “incredible,” Clinton would provide anecdotes of women who would leave welfare, lose their health coverage for their children, only to then be paying taxes to provide health care to the women who chose not to work.³⁵ While these comments were in large part to support Clinton’s call for health care reform by identifying an additional benefit of universal care—the removal of the disincentive to work for welfare recipients—it is nonetheless an important point concerning Clinton’s problem definition. Such comments worked to place blame on the system while also presenting a rational image of a mother seeking to do the best for her children in a difficult situation, an image with which middle class audiences could identify. In a sense, the women were choosing not to work due to their “family values.”

In addition to trying to reframe the concrete act of receiving welfare, Clinton also attempted to redefine the perceived value system of welfare recipients, arguing that their values did indeed match the values of the American people as a whole. Speaking for welfare recipients, usually after once again establishing his expertise in the area, Clinton would often claim that they too “hated” welfare, were “absolutely dying to get out,” and that of all the Americans that disapproved of welfare, welfare recipients themselves were the most adamant about change.³⁶ Establishing the notion of unanimous discontent with welfare, Clinton would explain that “no one” liked the system, “least of all most people who live on it.”³⁷ He would often specifically invite listeners to ask welfare recipients, assuring them that they would be the “first to tell you” that the system did not work and that they had the “deepest desire” to change the system.³⁸ Indeed, through his extended experience with welfare recipients, Clinton had “almost never met anybody that didn’t want to get off.”³⁹

Not only did welfare recipients appropriately dislike welfare, but they also, Clinton argued, were in line with the American values of work and family. In April of 1996, Clinton explained the potential he saw in welfare recipients: “[B]ased on my 12 years as a Governor, I have a very strong conviction that most people on welfare are dying to get off of it if they can be given the ways to work and support themselves and they don't have to hurt their kids.”⁴⁰ Such a conditional statement was typical of Clinton’s rhetoric throughout his first term. They served to reinforce his primary point: the problem was not inherently with the welfare recipient—they had the appropriate values—but the system itself. Clinton especially worked to establish the idea that welfare recipients wanted to work, but could only do so if provided with opportunities to do so and had some key barriers removed, such as the lack of child care and health care for low income working families.⁴¹ Clinton would often discuss how welfare recipients wanted to succeed *both* as workers and parents, again like all Americans.⁴² As Clinton neatly summarized in his 1994 State of the Union address: “The people who most want to change this system are the people who are dependent on it. They want to get off welfare. They want to go back to work. They want to do right by their kids.”⁴³ Those dual goals would prove critical to Clinton’s rhetoric in this area, and his policies would later often rely on the need to provide assistance to the poor to meet both goals. Such framing

worked to criticize both the current system (which allowed people to succeed perhaps as parents, but not as workers) as well as some of the Republican proposals (which forced people to work but did not give them the necessary tools to succeed as parents at the same time), as well as build identification between the welfare recipients and the American majority. The similarities between the two was again emphasized during a July 1995 radio address, when Clinton said: “The vast majority of these Americans dream the same dreams most of us do. They want the same dignity that comes from going to work and the pride that comes from doing right by their children. They want to be independent.”⁴⁴

A primary means for Clinton to fortify these points was through narrative examples. During his 1994 State of the Union address, for example, Clinton told the following story:

I once had a hearing when I was a governor and I brought in people on welfare from all over America who had found their way to work. The woman from my state who testified was asked this question: What's the best thing about being off welfare and in a job? And, without blinking an eye, she looked at 40 governors and she said, “When my boy goes to school and they say what does your mother do for a living, he can give an answer.” These people want a better system, and we ought to give it to them.

Clinton employed the same anecdote in his 1992 Georgetown speech, when introducing his welfare proposal in 1994, and at the signing ceremony of the bill in 1996, when he actually had the mother from the anecdote speak and introduce him. The use of such positive anecdotes was often paired with the Reaganesque tactic of pointing to “heroes in the balcony.” At his June 1994 speech, for example, Clinton introduced nine proud former welfare mothers to his audience and in his 1995 State of the Union, he introduced Lynn Woolsey as “America’s best example . . . who worked her way off welfare to become a congresswoman.”⁴⁵ All these examples worked to solidify Clinton’s optimism concerning the value system and future potential of many welfare recipients.

Whereas Clinton clearly worked hard to rehabilitate the typical negative image of the welfare recipient, his rhetoric was not devoid of criticism. Clinton focused on establishing the future potential of welfare recipients, but was considerably less sympathetic concerning their past. Clinton never clearly explained, for example, how the welfare recipients were “trapped” in the first place. Elsewhere in his speeches, he often alluded to “past mistakes” and “past sins” made by welfare recipients, and often mentioned the irresponsibilities of teenage pregnancy when discussing welfare recipients.⁴⁶ Such comments implied individualistic causation and negative behavior, and were much more in line with the public’s likely negative image of welfare recipients. One clear example occurred during the 1995 State of the Union, when he said, “I have no problem with punishing bad behavior or the refusal to be a worker or a student or a responsible parent. I just don’t want to punish poverty and past mistakes. All of us have made our mistakes, and none of us can change our yesterdays. But every one of us can change our tomorrows.” This statement is a clear acceptance of the deserving-undeserving distinction, followed by an

attempt to dismiss or forgive past behavior in the face of a promising future. The argument also fit well with Clinton's oft-repeated catch phrase that welfare should be "A second chance, not a way of life."

In summary, I would argue that Clinton's construction of the welfare recipient was a qualified purification that was ambiguously situated between the extremes of blaming or absolving the poor. He focused on the future potential of welfare recipients, but also implied they had made past mistakes. Clinton thus did not challenge the mainstream's perception that assumed an individual attribution for poverty, but by arguing that the poor had the requisite values to join the mainstream, he was implicitly refuting the "culture of poverty" thesis that worked to dismiss any efforts to help the poor. In the end, it was clear that Clinton was attempting to establish that the most relevant barrier to progress was not the welfare recipient, but rather the system that continued to punish past behavior.

The Image of the Child

The second major depiction that was consistently present in Clinton's welfare rhetoric was that of children in poverty. The invocation of the poor child has always been a powerful rhetorical strategy heavily steeped in the American mythos of equal opportunity. Framing poverty in terms of its impact on children inherently places focus on overly sympathetic figures. After all, even Charles Murray wrote "there is no such thing as an undeserving five-year old."⁴⁷ Clinton discussed poor children much more often than his predecessors, but his depiction of these children remained rather limited overall.

In his speeches, Clinton would often make brief comments that highlighted the innocent nature of children. He made a number of references that simply worked to solidify the notion that children were innocent and undeserving of poverty. At times such references were as simple as specifically mentioning "innocent children" or "innocent babies" while discussing welfare and poverty issues.⁴⁸ Clinton would also emphasize the deserving nature of poor children by explaining that they were "not the cause of the problems that they face in life" or that it was "not their fault what families they were born into."⁴⁹ Speaking to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April 1995, Clinton expanded a bit on the innocence of the children on welfare, saying, "Rich or poor, black, white, or brown, in or out of wedlock, a baby is a baby, a child is a child. It's part of our future, and we have an obligation to those children not to punish them for something over which they had absolutely no control."⁵⁰ During a radio address the following day, Clinton gave a similar appeal:

These children didn't choose to be born to single mothers; they didn't choose to be born on welfare; they didn't choose to be born to women who are teenagers. We ought to remember that a child is a child, a baby is a baby. Whether they're white, black, or brown, whether they're born in or out of wedlock, anybody anywhere is entitled to a

chance and innocence if it's a baby. We simply shouldn't punish babies and children for their parents' mistakes.⁵¹

Once again, a week later, Clinton repeated a very similar paragraph during a news conference.⁵² In these examples, Clinton actually trumped the image of poor children with that of poor babies, while also expressing their innocence somewhat at the expense of the innocence of their parents.

Clinton also often discussed the increasing number of poor children. Considering children were inherently innocent, the mere existence of poor children could be considered a violation of equal opportunity. A sharp expansion in the number of poor children would thus be especially troublesome. Early in his first term, Clinton would mention the “millions and millions” or “legions” of poor children in the United States, or reveal that one in every five children in the country were poor.⁵³ At times he would praise the decreasing poverty rate for the elderly, but then show concern for the increasing poverty rate for children, mentioning that children were becoming a much larger percentage of the poor.⁵⁴ Often in the context of this “new poor,” Clinton would mention their inherent unpopularity and political weakness. In March of 1993, Clinton first mentioned that children, along with their often young, single mothers, were considered “a new class of poor people” that were “dramatically undervalued,” having “no advocates in many councils of power.”⁵⁵ To the National Governors’ Association in 1995, he explained how poor children were “very poorly organized.”⁵⁶ A month later to that same organization, Clinton mentioned that the “poor children lobby” was a “poor match” for political forces in State legislatures.⁵⁷ Later, he told other groups that it was not “popular” or “fashionable” to “speak up” for the poor children today.⁵⁸ Such comments worked to emphasize that not only were children undeserving of the poverty and growing in numbers, but were also limited in their ability to help themselves and improve their situation without outside assistance, and it was only getting worse. The changing nature of poverty therefore required even more involvement by the non-poor.

Clinton most often relied on the image of the poor child when criticizing the Republican welfare proposals from 1994 to 1996. Clinton used the soundbite that the Republican bill was “weak on work and tough on children” in speech after speech throughout this time period. He also often repeated the charge that the bill would “punish” poor children and cause them to “suffer.”⁵⁹ Clinton’s critiques of the Republican proposals seemed designed to shift focus away from the dominant and negative image of the welfare mother to the more sympathetic image of the poor child.

In summary, Clinton clearly discussed children in this context much more often than his predecessors. However, despite the increased frequency of these references, Clinton’s appeals to the struggles of poor children remained rather limited. Most of Clinton’s comments concerning poor children served as warnings or attacks against Republican policies. They often did not, in other words, focus on a current problem that needed to be addressed, but rather a potential future problem that needed to be avoided. If the current predicament of poor children was discussed, the cause was often identified not as

low wages or lack of opportunity, but rather poor choices made by the parents of the children, especially in terms of having children when unmarried. Clinton's frequent invocation of poor children, in other words, was often juxtaposed to his mixed depiction of welfare mothers, a comparison that worked to highlight the innocence of poor children by rendering a thinly veiled attack on their parents. Of course, elsewhere Clinton would plead with his audiences to disregard the parents' "mistakes" of the past and focus on the future potential of welfare recipients, nonetheless it is clear that Clinton's use of the image of the poor child was not designed as a call to action to address poverty. Although Clinton did sprinkle his speeches liberally with references to innocent children or babies that should not be punished or caused to suffer, he never actually told any stories about these poor children, nor was a poor child ever mentioned by name. All in all, Clinton seemed to understand the power of appealing to poor children—relying on it to paint Republican proposals as mean-spirited—but did not attempt to develop the appeal very strongly.

The Deadbeat Parent

Of Clinton's primary relevant depictions, the deadbeat parent was clearly the most negative, playing the part of the villain. Interestingly, Clinton typically referenced to the gender neutral "deadbeat parent," rather than the more common "deadbeat dad," though he did once explain after using deadbeat dad that it was "sometimes deadbeat moms, but usually deadbeat dads."⁶⁰ Increasing the collection of child support was a key issue for Clinton, and throughout his time in office he supported a number of measures to help with such collections, including automatically withholding payments from paychecks, denying drivers and professional licenses to those who refuse to pay, seeking identification of paternity in all childbirths, and developing more sophisticated means for tracking them from job to job and state to state. Clinton often called for the "toughest possible child support enforcement" and the "most sweeping crackdown on deadbeat parents in history."⁶¹ Clinton's rhetoric clearly painted deadbeat parents as criminals. Clinton discussed putting "most wanted posters" up in post offices with pictures of deadbeat parents, and called for bringing "these criminals to justice" and insuring they had "nowhere to hide."⁶² In a radio address in March 1995, Clinton sent a stern warning to delinquent parents, saying: "If you neglect your responsibility to support your children, we'll suspend your license, garnish your pay, track you down, and make you pay."⁶³

Clinton also identified the low level of child support payments as an additional cause of welfare receipt, providing another justification of receipt that worked to deflect blame from the welfare mother. In another March 1995 radio address, for example, Clinton told the story of a mother who was forced into welfare due to a "deadbeat dad":

Eighteen years ago, Gerri Jensen's husband abandoned her and her two young sons. She held down several low-paying jobs, but eventually was forced to turn to welfare because

her ex-husband stopped paying child support altogether. She got so fed up with weak laws and bureaucratic runarounds that she launched a grassroots movement to crack down on deadbeat parents nationwide. We are all in her debt, and we all owe an obligation to all the people like her in America who are doing their dead-level best to be good parents. They deserve our support.⁶⁴

In this short anecdote, Clinton painted the father as villain, the mother as a victim at first, but then as a hero as she overcame her obstacles to make a difference. On a number of occasions, Clinton said that 800,000 “mothers and children” would exit welfare “immediately” if all the money owed by deadbeat parents would be collected.⁶⁵

Overall, the depiction of the deadbeat parent clearly worked to draw negative attention away from the welfare mother, and to increase the innocence of the poor child through the contrast effect. The depiction offered a target of criticism that would inherently have few supporters. Clinton could place blame on deadbeat parents without seeming mean or unfair to the poor, and still distract attention from broader systematic concerns. In other words, the tough deadbeat parent rhetoric tied in well with Clinton’s “responsibility” rhetoric, and served as a useful point of focus for his New Democrat perspective. It placed blame on lack of individual responsibility, but did so in a way that also worked to rehabilitate the image of the welfare mother somewhat and enhance the innocence of the welfare child.

The Working Poor

The last of Clinton’s four major depictions was that of the working poor. The working poor generally represented a sympathetic population, fitting the image of the deserving poor due to their labor, or at least due to their lack of idleness. Similar to poor children, the working poor were mentioned by Clinton to a much greater extent than his predecessors. Also similar to his discussion of children, Clinton for the most part simply mentioned the existence of the working poor, or, in an even more rhetorically loaded term, “working families.” Most often, Clinton provided the figure that eighteen percent of Americans who work full time were actually under the poverty line, calling them the “quiet heroes of this economy.”⁶⁶ In remarks made in July of 1993, for example, Clinton told the National Association of County Officials:

Eighteen percent of America's workers today are working and still living below the Federal poverty line. An enormous number of working parents go home at night to children, having worked a full day and a full week, and still live below the poverty line.⁶⁷

In an interview the following day, Clinton repeated the statistic, seemingly cognizant that most audiences would be surprised by the number. In the interview he explained that there are “two kinds of low-income

people in the economy. . . . those that are working and those that aren't. Believe it or not, about 18 percent of all working people are still below the Federal poverty line."⁶⁸ A few days later, he went into even greater detail, again expressing his surprise:

You know, it's amazing to me how many American families still live in poverty. About 18 percent of the work force, nearly one in five families, have a worker and still do not reach the Federal poverty line. There are 36 million, approximately, low-income Americans; about 20 million of them live in a family that works, with someone working at least part of the year; 6 million live in families where someone works all year round, full-time, and the family is still in poverty. And as I said, where there is a family of four, about one in five, or 18 percent, have insufficient incomes to lift them above the Federal poverty line.⁶⁹

Throughout the summer of 1993, Clinton provided audiences with that statistic on a number of other occasions, primarily in support of his proposal to increase the EITC.⁷⁰ At times, he specifically questioned the fairness of the existence of the working poor, implying that to work full time but remain in poverty represented a deficiency in rewarding work, and thus provided an incentive for welfare receipt. For example, after once again citing the eighteen percent of workers in poverty, Clinton told a conference audience that it is "hard to lecture people, to say, 'Well, don't be on welfare; go to work,' if you don't reward work."⁷¹

While supporting the EITC increase, Clinton implicitly invoked the image of the working poor when he frequently expressed the ideal that any family with a full time worker and children in the home should not be in poverty. After the EITC increase passed, Clinton often cited that the legislation lifted 15 million "working families" out of poverty, as he did in his 1994 State of the Union address.⁷²

In 1994, the appeals to the working poor tapered off in frequency, and it was not until Clinton put a minimum wage increase high on his agenda in January of 1995 that the working poor once again became an important character in Clinton's speeches. Throughout 1995, Clinton would mention that people could not "make a living on \$4.25 an hour, especially if you have children, even with the working families tax cut we passed last year."⁷³ Utilizing his typical strategy of co-opting Republican key words and reframing them, Clinton would cite the need to support "family values" by improving the situation for working families earning only minimum wage.⁷⁴ Similar to before, Clinton discussed how many families worked full time but remained in poverty due to low wages. For examples, in remarks made to the community in Iowa, Clinton said:

You know, in Washington, there's a lot of talk about family values. Well, I'll tell you one thing, it's pretty hard to raise a family on \$4.25 an hour. But there are millions of people out there trying to do it. And they're heroes to me. When I think of the people that get up every day, knowing they could take a powder and go on welfare and get health care for

their kids, and they still show up for work and they do their 40 hours and sometimes they do a lot more, and they do it for the minimum wage because they believe in the dignity of work and they want to set a good example for their children, and I can't get anybody to schedule for a vote raising the minimum wage to take it from \$4.25 just to \$5.15 an hour and get out of a 40-year low in earning power, that's not my idea of the high-tech economy. I think the American people believe we can do better than that. And I believe if we're going to honor work and family, we ought to do better than that. And I hope you will support it.⁷⁵

Clinton returned to the notion of calling these working poor “heroes” in a number of other speeches in the following months, calling them such things as the “greatest heroes in this country,” “real heroes in my book,” “real family heroes,” and “[s]ome of America's greatest working heroes.”⁷⁶ With each mention, Clinton emphasized the dual nature of the struggle to succeed both at work and at home, and how raising the minimum wage would “honor both work and family.”⁷⁷ As he did in the excerpt quoted above, he also emphasized the fact that the working poor were choosing to stay off welfare despite the incentives welfare compared to working for minimum wage. When the minimum wage increase finally passed in July of 1996, Clinton told the reporters gathered that it was “a very good day for America's working families” because “10 million hard-working Americans will get a little bit of help to raise their children and keep their family strong,” adding that the increase “will honor our most basic values, work and family, opportunity and responsibility.”⁷⁸ In sum, Clinton’s comments concerning the working poor often worked to increase identification between the working poor and other working families, focusing on their similar struggles and similar values. In addition, similar to the image of the poor child, the depiction of the working poor tended to serve as an implicit criticism on the welfare poor, as the former were praised for choosing to work rather than “taking a powder” and accepting welfare.

Conclusion to Clinton’s Depictions

Throughout his first term, four key depictions consistently reappeared in Clinton’s rhetoric concerning poverty and welfare issues. Clinton offered a conflicted image of the welfare mother, perhaps the most important of the four. He worked hard to establish that she held mainstream values and thus future potential, while at the same time Clinton certainly placed some responsibility on her for her situation. Clinton thus did not strongly refute the negative public stereotype, but nonetheless constructed an image of the welfare mother that was willing to work and thus benefit from Clinton’s policies. In other words, Clinton focused on providing a sense of efficacy to the public that the policies would be helpful, thus counterattacking the futility thesis. Clinton did not, however, attack the notion that the welfare poor were not responsible for their poverty.

Clinton also offered important depictions of poor children and deadbeat parents. Clinton used the image of innocent poor children to attack Republican proposals, while at the same time it was often used at the expense of the welfare mother. The deadbeat parent served as an alternative scapegoat to the welfare queen, and represented another interesting centrist argument. While it was an attack that blamed the poor and focused on individual behavior, it was also an implicit defense of the single welfare mother. By arguing that it was the father that abdicated individual responsibility by walking away from his children, rather than the mother that was promiscuous or irresponsible, Clinton was providing further qualified support for his defense of the welfare mother.

Lastly, to Clinton the working poor seemed to represent an interesting entity that served practically as a link between the welfare poor and the middle class. His welfare reform policies sought first to move the welfare poor to become part of the working poor by requiring work and providing opportunity. Then two other key policies Clinton advocated during his first term—increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit and the minimum wage—worked to move the working poor into the middle class. At the same time, the ranks of the working poor was also being fed from the top, as more and more of the middle class had been slipping down the economic scale into poverty. Clinton’s 1992 campaign in particular appealed often to the anxious middle class, who, as Clinton explained in a typical campaign appeal, had “worked harder for less money to pay more for health care, for housing, for education, for taxes.” “Poverty has exploded,” Clinton added, “especially among working people.” Clinton would make similar appeals later in his first term, explaining that the people had been “working harder and harder for stagnant wages and falling closer and closer to the poverty line.”⁷⁹ The working poor thus served as a critical link between the welfare poor and the middle class, and thus a point of identification. The welfare poor, at least how Clinton depicted them, hoped to “escape” the trap of welfare dependency and become independent (i.e. middle class). The middle class, on the other hand, feared falling to the level of the working poor, or, even worse, the welfare poor. Understanding the anxiety that had been growing within the middle class concerning their economic outlook, Clinton rhetorically constructed the situation so that the anxious middle class and the maligned welfare poor would find themselves as kindred spirits. In the process, the Democratic Party had, at least symbolically, reconstructed its New Deal constituency with the broadly supported image of working families.

Clinton Anti-Welfare Rhetoric

“For so long government has failed us, and one of its worst failures has been welfare.”⁸⁰ These words, part of a 1992 Clinton campaign advertisement, clearly situated Clinton’s perspective on the welfare system. Throughout the 1992 campaign, Clinton catchphrases such as “ending welfare as we know it” and making welfare “a second chance, not a way of life” were repeated again and again. To Clinton and

the New Democrats, welfare was an easy and strategic target. It was universally condemned by the public, whose negative opinion of it seemed to go along with many of the typical Republican attacks on the Democratic Party or government in general, especially in terms of being wasteful, counterproductive, and too often providing “something for nothing.” Clinton’s anti-welfare rhetoric was thus a key aspect of his attempt to separate himself from the stereotypes of the “Old Democrats.” Overall, Clinton made five primary points against welfare: it was broken, it was hated by all, it worked as a trap, it undermined American values, and it was outdated. Each attack worked to reify the public’s already negative image of welfare, especially considering they were coming from a Democratic president who often boasted of his expertise on the welfare issue.

Clinton’s most basic attack on welfare was simply to explain that it did not work. In almost every speech concerning reforming welfare, Clinton used adjectives such as “broken” or “failed” to modify “welfare system.” Such comments combined with Clinton’s second primary point—that everyone hated welfare. Clinton often explained that “no one” liked the broken welfare system, and “every American” wanted reform.⁸¹ Once, at a Governors Leadership Conference, Clinton mentioned that welfare reform had become like “God, motherhood, and apple pie; everybody’s for it,” adding, “And that’s good.”⁸² Clinton specifically singled out both welfare recipients and taxpayers as groups particularly displeased with the current system. All in all, Clinton made it clear that the system had few, if any, supporters.

The third primary point Clinton repeatedly made in criticizing the welfare system relied on the now-familiar “trap” metaphor, which Clinton invoked in practically every major speech about welfare. The use of the metaphor represents an interesting moderate argument. By using this analogy and linking it to the concept of dependency, Clinton was condemning the system from a conservative viewpoint. At the same time, however, he was removing much of the blame for that dependence from the person who was trapped: someone caught in a trap is typically not at fault (hence perhaps *deserving* of assistance). In other words, the trap metaphor helped place the locus of responsibility outside the individual and onto the system itself.

Clinton most significant attack on welfare focused on its alleged negative impact on key American values. During the 1994 State of the Union, for example, Clinton said the following when discussing the welfare system:

It doesn't work. It defies our values as a Nation. If we value work, we can't justify a system that makes welfare more attractive than work if people are worried about losing their health care. If we value responsibility, we can't ignore the \$34 billion in child support absent parents ought to be paying to millions of parents who are taking care of their children. If we value strong families, we can't perpetuate a system that actually penalizes those who stay together. Can you believe that a child who has a child gets

more money from the Government for leaving home than for staying home with a parent or a grandparent? That's not just bad policy, it's wrong. And we ought to change it.⁸³

On several other occasions, Clinton argued that the welfare system “undermined,” did not “honor,” or was “inconsistent with” American values, but rather taught the “wrong values” and rewarded “wrong choices.”⁸⁴ More than once Clinton argued that there was “no greater gap between mainstream American values and modern Government than we find in the welfare system.”⁸⁵ The three values Clinton typically focused upon as being violated were work, family, and responsibility, all key values to Clinton’s “New Democrat” philosophy. In a 1995 radio address, for example, Clinton focused on those three values while attacking the current system:

It doesn't honor our values of work and family and personal responsibility. . . . The current system must be replaced. Instead of requiring people to work, now it penalizes people who go to work. Instead of strengthening families, now it gives teenagers a separate check to leave home, leave school, and set up their own households. Instead of demanding responsibility, it lets too many parents who owe child support just walk away without paying. That's not right, and it's time to change it.⁸⁶

Similarly, during his 1995 State of the Union address, Clinton explained that “[n]othing has done more to undermine our sense of common responsibility than our failed welfare system. . . . It rewards welfare over work. It undermines family values. It lets millions of parents get away without paying their child support.”⁸⁷

While Clinton would explain that welfare “discouraged work,” he also often explained in more detail, as shown during the discussion of Clinton’s depiction of the welfare recipient, that the welfare check was only a minor reason for people to stay on welfare, and that the whole system—including the lack of health care and affordable child care—contributed to the disincentive to work. Similarly, the connection between welfare and anti-responsibility was heavily tied to weak child support provisions, not just welfare. In other words, welfare was only part of those two stories. As a result, Clinton discussed welfare’s anti-family impact to a much greater degree than the other two values. Clinton’s speeches often included short jabs at welfare, claiming it did such things as “destroy[ed] families,” “aggravated some of the worst pressures in the breakdown of the family in this country,” “encouraged families to break up,” or “pull[ed] families apart.”⁸⁸

Clinton’s final point against welfare focused on how the system was simply out of date. Here Clinton played off his “expertise” on welfare and explained how the system was created with good intentions, but was no longer appropriate due to economic and social changes. In response to a question during an appearance in August of 1993, for example, Clinton provided an extended commentary on welfare’s historical development:

The original welfare system was set up to deal with an American society that existed about 50 years ago, where nearly everybody who wanted to work could find some kind of job at some low level, but they could find some kind of job. There were very few women in the work force, if they were in the home and they had children. And the typical welfare recipient in the beginning was, let's say, a West Virginia miner's widow, 60 years ago. The husband gets killed in the mines. They live up in the hills and hollows of West Virginia. The woman has a rough-grade education. She's got three or four kids, no way to go to work, no job to find, and the welfare supports the kids. Then there was another typical welfare recipient that represents about half the people on welfare today, for whom welfare should exist, the people who hit on hard times. Suddenly a spouse dies, and there's two little children in the home, and you can't work. Or you lose a job, and you can't get another one, and you run out of unemployment benefits. In other words, about half the people on welfare only stay for 4, 5, 6 months, and then they get off. Those are the people we would all want a welfare system for, because they fall through the unemployment system cracks or they need support or they have little children. They can't be working because they have a whole slew of them or whatever. Increasingly, however, there are people on welfare whose parents were on welfare, whose grandparents were on welfare, who never have worked, and who basically can stay on forever as long as they have children under a certain age, because welfare's proper name is Aid to Families with Dependent Children, AFDC, that's what it means.⁸⁹

Later, announcing his welfare proposal in June of 1994, Clinton explained that the welfare system was “started for the right common purpose of helping people who fall by the wayside,” and “still works that way for some. . . . [b]ut for many the system has worked to undermine the very values that people need to put themselves and their lives back on track.”⁹⁰ Again, in a December 1994 radio address, Clinton reaffirmed that welfare “was set up for all the right reasons,” and still helped an “awful lot of people,” but for “millions and millions” it was “broken badly.”⁹¹ In October of 1994, Clinton quoted FDR’s famous line that the “dole” was a “a subtle destroyer of the human spirit,” and again emphasized that “[n]o one ever intended for it to work this way.”⁹² Simply put, Clinton explained, welfare was a “system that was designed for another age” or “designed for a population different from the population now on welfare.”⁹³ He returned to the image of the “coal miner’s widow” as the original intended recipient of welfare again in September of 1995 and July of 1996.⁹⁴

This line of reasoning perhaps worked to justify or at least soften the criticism that Clinton was advocating the end of a program begun by FDR by dissociating the criticism of the current system from its original intention. This intent was perhaps made clear during a press conference after Clinton announced he would sign the bill in July of 1996. A reporter asked Clinton if he was concerned that he, as a

Democrat, was “helping to dismantle something that was put in place by Democrats 60 years ago.” Clinton’s response returned again to the argument that welfare had outlived its usefulness due to changing times:

No. No, because it was put in place 60 years ago when the poverty population of America was fundamentally different than it is now. As Senator Moynihan—you know, Senator Moynihan strongly disagrees with me on this, but as he has pointed out repeatedly, when welfare was created the typical welfare recipient was a miner's widow with no education, small children, husband dies in the mine, no expectation that there was a job for the widow to do or that she ever could do it—very few out-of-wedlock pregnancies and births. The whole dynamics were different then. So I have always thought that the Democratic Party should be on the side of creating opportunity and promoting empowerment and responsibility for people, and a system that was in place 60 years ago that worked for the poverty population then is not the one we need now. But the nature of the poverty population is so different now that I am convinced we have got to be willing to experiment, to try to work to find ways to break the cycle of dependency that keeps dragging folks down.⁹⁵

In this response in particular, the connection between Clinton’s criticism of the current system and his goals for the new system are clear. The purpose of welfare, as advocated by Johnson, Nixon, and Carter, needed to change from maintenance of unemployables to a vehicle that encouraged and assisted individuals to become self-sufficient.

In conclusion, Clinton’s criticism of the welfare system mirrored those of his predecessors in many ways, especially in terms of attacking its negative impact on work and family, and practically avoiding any mention of any positive impact. Clinton’s criticisms, however, should be considered more devastating, especially compared to Nixon and Reagan, because he was not only a Democrat, but a Democrat who continuously boasted of specific expertise concerning welfare policy. Clinton’s assault on the welfare system likely worked to erode the burden of proof for advocates of change, and essentially established that any change was justified, or at least would be better than the current system. Once the Democrats lost control of Congress and began pushing their own version of welfare reform, this notion of any change enjoying the advantage of presumption likely worked against Clinton’s opposition to Republican proposals. While Clinton’s criticisms painted him into a corner concerning the 1996 bill, they nonetheless also worked to deflect attention from the welfare recipients themselves. Once again, it was the welfare system, not the people, that deserved the most condemnation.

Clinton's Welfare Reform Rhetoric

Within the frame established by Clinton's construction of the welfare system as the problem, the first step in implementing his solution was simple: ending welfare as we knew it. The phrase, repeated perhaps more often than any other in Clinton's rhetoric, was rather ambiguous. It called for an end to the current welfare system, but did not clearly identify its replacement. Considering the public's disdain for "welfare," however, the phrase was likely received well by the masses. Once again, due to the sustained attack on welfare for the past twenty years, practically anything would be preferable to the present system in the eyes of most Americans. Overall, Clinton, like Johnson, Nixon, and Carter before him, wanted welfare to serve as a bridge to independence rather than a trap that fostered dependence. His plan to make that happen, however, differed somewhat from what his predecessors envisioned. Clinton welfare reform proposals represented an application of Clinton's New Democratic "New Covenant" model, which called for a reciprocal relationship between the government and the poor, with the former providing opportunity but expecting responsibility from the latter. By using this philosophical framework, Clinton was able to call for tough requirements on the nation's poor (such as work requirements, welfare time limits, and anti-teen pregnancy provisions), while still pursuing traditional progressive goals (such as health care reform, minimum wage increases, and more funds for child care, job training, and the like). This examination of Clinton's vision of welfare reform will first examine how Clinton defined new goals for the program, then how he discussed the various policy components on each side of the responsibility-opportunity dyad.

Clinton's welfare rhetoric reveals that by "ending welfare as we know it" he meant to transform welfare from a program that tended to cause dependency and undermine work and family to one that led to independence and honored those values. This transformation was expressed in a number of different ways. Most commonly, Clinton discussed how he hoped to make welfare a "second chance, not a way of life." In doing so, he was implying that the receipt of welfare had become a way of life for many, and that his new proposals would represent an escape from that life. In other occasions, he explained the transformation as a move from welfare to work, a welfare check to a paycheck, dependence to independence, or dependence to dignity. Welfare's new purpose would be to "empower" people, to "liberate" welfare recipients, and to be a "path" or "bridge" to a job.⁹⁶

The most important transformation Clinton envisioned with his new welfare program concerned the system's impact on American values. Once again, Clinton focused on two values in particular: work and family. Rather than undermine those values, the new welfare system would now "honor," "embrace," "reward," "restore," "promote," and "reflect" them. Welfare reform would be "pro-work" and "pro-family." Of the two, work was clearly recognized as the most important value for welfare to uphold. Welfare reform would "first and foremost" be about work, the "best social program ever invented."⁹⁷ While Clinton certainly placed work front and center when discussing welfare reform, he was also careful

to interject the importance of honoring family, often acknowledging that requiring work indiscriminately could harm families. After reiterating the importance of work, Clinton would often state that welfare reform was “also” about family, and that he did not want to hurt children. Again and again, he set a dual goal of welfare as helping people to succeed *both* as workers and parents, or at work and at home, and rejected the idea of forcing people to choose between the two. He wanted welfare to require and reward work, but also enable “people who work to be responsible workers and good parents at the same time.”⁹⁸ After the 1994 elections that put the Republicans in power led to several Republican welfare reform proposals, Clinton would often reject the proposals on the basis that while they supported work, they did not sufficiently support family.

In order to realize the dual pursuit of these goals, Clinton relied on the opportunity-responsibility rhetoric of the New Covenant. Clinton argued that by providing real opportunity and expecting responsibility, government would honor both work and family. Providing opportunity meant individuals would receive help to acquire necessary education and skills to qualify for jobs, they would have the needed child care, health care, and child support to be able to take those jobs without harming their family, and, finally, those jobs would both exist and pay enough to support their family. Responsibility would then require those individuals to take advantage of those opportunities by requiring work, as well as expecting “responsible” behavior concerning family, such as avoiding unwed pregnancies, having young mothers stay home and continue their education, and forcing deadbeat parents to support their children. This opportunity-responsibility concept was often summarized neatly by two key phrases repeated often by the president. The first was Clinton’s call for the “hard simple rule” that “everyone who can work, must work,” which was echoed in his Georgetown address, his Nomination Acceptance address, the 1994 State of the Union, and the 1995 State of the Union, among others.⁹⁹ The second, repeated in most of the same texts, was Clinton’s belief that “people who work hard and play by the rules should not live in poverty.” During an exchange with reporters concerning the Earned Income Tax Credit in 1993, Clinton clearly put the two together, arguing that “[w]e ought to have two principles that operate in this country: People who can work should work, but if they do work, their families at home shouldn’t be poor.”¹⁰⁰

Clinton’s rhetoric concerning the reciprocal relationship between opportunity and responsibility and the specific policy instruments concerning each represents a critical point of analysis. In particular, the question of which side was predominant essentially dictates the ideological perspective of Clinton’s proposals. Which of the two was more necessary? How far was each condition from being realized? How difficult would it be to provide true opportunity and expect responsibility? Clearly, the two parties tended to differ on the answers to those questions. Republicans, especially the House Republicans who took over Congress in 1994, tended to argue that ample opportunity already existed, and that the primary missing ingredient was individual responsibility. The traditional Democratic position, however, was that true opportunity was lacking for many of the nation’s poor, and that focusing on individual responsibility was

simply a thinly veiled and unfair attack on the disadvantaged. In other words, Republicans focused on the need for more responsibility from the undeserving poor, and Democrats on the need for opportunity for the deserving poor. As a New Democrat, Clinton clearly hoped to bridge the gap between these two perspectives with his New Covenant rhetoric. The purpose of the New Democrat position, after all, was to reinvigorate the progressive nature of the Democratic Party in part by undermining the negative stereotype that Democrats were unconcerned about personal responsibility, while still pursuing the goal of government playing a key role in providing opportunity.

Requiring Responsibility

The key policy aspects of the responsibility side focused on the work requirements and time limits to welfare. These aspects were mentioned early in his 1992 campaign, were the key components of his 1994 proposal, and were considered uncontroversial to Clinton when included in the Republican proposals in 1995 and 1996. Clinton often explained that the tough work requirements and time limits were a point of common ground between him and the Republicans, and that he felt comfortable being “very tough” on requiring people to work.

Additional policy aspects tied to responsibility included toughening the child support provisions and various anti-teen pregnancy proposals. Clinton was consistent on the child-support provisions, which were aimed at increasing the number of collections made from deadbeat parents. This was another policy area that was considered uncontroversial. Attempting to reduce teen pregnancy, however, represented a point of conflict. While all generally supported the goal, the appropriate role of government in such efforts was controversial. Clinton relied on responsibility rhetoric heavily in addressing the need to improve families, announcing that the government would not “subsidize irresponsible or reckless behavior.”¹⁰¹ Yet another Clinton catchphrase during this time period was that “governments don’t raise children, parents do.”¹⁰² He called on parents to take responsibility for their children, and expressed serious concern with the various statistics that revealed the “explosion” of births to unmarried parents, the breakdown of family life, and the fact that so many children were having children.¹⁰³ As a response, Clinton called the prevention of teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births a “critical part” of welfare reform.¹⁰⁴ Announcing his welfare proposal in June of 1994, Clinton discussed the problem of teen pregnancy and out-of-wedlock births at length:

We should encourage teen parents to live at home, stay in school, take responsibility for their own futures and their children's futures. And the financial incentives of the welfare system ought to do that instead of just the reverse. We have to change the signals we are sending here. We also have to face the fact that we have a big welfare problem because the rate of children born out of wedlock, where there was no marriage, is going up

dramatically. The rate of illegitimacy has literally quadrupled since Daniel Patrick Moynihan, now a Senator from New York, first called it to our attention 30 years ago. At the rate we're going, unless we reverse it, within 10 years more than half of our children will be born in homes where there has never been a marriage. We must keep people from the need to go on welfare in the first place by emphasizing a national campaign against teen pregnancy, to send a powerful message that it is wrong to continue this trend, that children should not be born until parents are married and fully capable of taking care of them.¹⁰⁵

Sending the bill to Congress a few days later, Clinton explained that the bill included a “national campaign against teen pregnancy and a national clearinghouse on teen pregnancy prevention” which would include grants for 1,000 middle and high schools in disadvantaged areas to develop “innovative teen pregnancy prevention programs.”¹⁰⁶ In 1995, he called for a policy that required teen mothers to sign a work contract, and then stay home and continue school to receive benefits.¹⁰⁷ He also encouraged giving states flexibility to determine new methods to reduce teen pregnancy. While Clinton did support these various means of reducing teen pregnancy, he balanced this sort of rhetoric with concerns of hurting innocent children. He rejected, for example, proposals that would prohibit funds to teenage mothers or would send the children of some welfare recipients to orphanages, attacking such ideas as “extreme right wing” and “ideological extremism.”¹⁰⁸

Providing Opportunity

On the other side of the scale was Clinton’s call to provide opportunity. The level of additional policies that were considered necessary in order to fulfill the opportunity side of the dyad was very telling information. Since Clinton was planning on requiring former welfare recipients to work in the hope that they would become self-sufficient, a number of potential barriers must be considered. For example, for a welfare recipient to become self-sufficient, a job must first exist; the individual must have the necessary education and skills to be qualified for the job; the job must pay enough to foster self-sufficiency, which would perhaps require additional funds or programs for child care, health care, and transportation; and, lastly, the person would have to accept the job and work. Clinton’s early rhetoric essentially argued that the work requirements and time limits would only be instilled if the structural barriers were removed. In addition, Clinton’s early rhetoric seemed to understand that many of those structural barriers did in fact exist for many welfare recipients. He often explained, for example, the difficulty of leaving welfare for low wage work due to the importance of health care and the need for child-care. He also explained that many of the single mothers on welfare were uneducated and lacked skills, and acknowledged that the

limited nature and quality of low wage labor. As a result, Clinton often provided a laundry list of policies that would need to precede any time limits or work requirements for welfare.

The primary goal Clinton continuously expressed from the opportunity side was to “make work pay.” Overall, Clinton sought to improve the relative value of low-wage work versus welfare by increasing the value of the former, rather than decreasing the value (or increasing the stigma) of the latter, as his predecessors seemed to attempt. As Clinton put in during a conference in Chicago in July of 1993: “It is hard to lecture people, to say, ‘Well, don't be on welfare; go to work,’ if you don't reward work.”¹⁰⁹ Here Clinton's rhetoric spilled over from a focus on welfare reform specifically and brought in the key related issues such as minimum wage and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Clinton considered increasing the EITC in 1993 a “critical first step” and the “most important thing we can do” in fixing the welfare system.¹¹⁰ He argued the increase would “remove all the financial incentive to prefer welfare to work,” be the “best incentive to stay off welfare [he] ever heard,” and the “the biggest incentive for people we have ever provided to get off welfare and go to work, to reward work and family and responsibility.”¹¹¹ In 1995, Clinton pushed hard on a minimum wage increase, identifying it as a “key” to welfare reform and arguing that it would also be an incentive to leave welfare.¹¹² Much of the defense of the minimum wage increase was based on the need to “make work pay” or “reward work.” Clinton finally signed the minimum wage increase into law just a few days before signing the welfare bill.

Beyond simply increasing the monetary benefits of work, Clinton supported a rather extensive list of expensive policy instruments all designed to help low-wage workers, especially those who may be forcibly removed from welfare. Clinton's original plan previewed in his 1992 campaign book *Putting People First* and then finally announced in June 1994, for example, included *increased* spending for child care, child support, health care, transportation, housing, job training, minimum wage, and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Whereas Clinton's original plan did require the establishment of time-limits to the welfare provisions, it was also accompanied by a *guarantee* of a “dignified and meaningful community service job,” a *guarantee* of “affordable quality health care,” and a *guarantee* of a working wage (all three of which were not included in the 1996 bill he eventually signed).¹¹³ Like Nixon and Carter before him, Clinton's proposal to “end welfare as we knew it” would cost more, not less, taxpayer money. However, although Clinton did often mention the need for these secondary programs in his various addresses, they rarely were the focus and thus most likely were not included as his rhetoric was filtered down to the nightly news, morning papers, and congressional hallways. As Clinton advisor George Stephanopoulos and Department of Labor secretary Robert Reich would later acknowledge, while the soundbites of ending welfare, requiring work, and demanding individual responsibility were designed to redefine the Democratic Party by garnering the headlines, the fine print concerning the price tag was not.¹¹⁴

After the Republican takeover of Congress, Clinton's opportunity rhetoric tended to backtrack. Before the mid-term elections, Clinton rejected the feasibility of cutting welfare without money for

significant training and support, and often emphasized the need to provide public jobs if necessary. In 1995 and 1996, Clinton retreated to a more defensive position in which he primarily criticized the Republican welfare bills for lacking child care provisions and thus being “tough on children,” without specifying exactly how the bill should be changed.¹¹⁵

Perhaps the most critical area in which Clinton seemed to backtrack was on the issue of whether some sort of job would be guaranteed or not. Early in his administration, Clinton would argue that after two years with additional child care, health care, and job training, individual would be required to work in either private or public jobs, implying that public jobs may be developed for the exiting welfare recipients.¹¹⁶ Often he specifically acknowledged the difficulty of requiring work when work may not be available, admitting “It's going to be hard for me to make those work if at the end of all this work to get off welfare, there isn't a job.”¹¹⁷ In an interview with Wisconsin media on July 20, 1993, the issue of whether jobs would be guaranteed or not to welfare recipients took center stage. First, Clinton explained the importance of having work available for his welfare reform to succeed, saying, “if we're going to call an end to welfare after 2 years, we have to know that there will be work available. So if there is not a private sector job we're going to have to offer work as an alternative to welfare.”¹¹⁸ Clinton was then asked by someone in the audience what would happen to those who did not have jobs. The president responded by saying:

I think we have to provide community service type jobs if there are no private sector jobs available in order to justify cutting off the benefits. I don't think you can do it in any other way. You can't tell people they have to work if there are no jobs. Once they get into the work force, then if they lose their jobs and get them back, they'll be like other people, they'll have access to unemployment. But for people who have not been in the work force, I think there has to be some sort of access to community service jobs if the private sector jobs aren't there.¹¹⁹

During the 1994 State of the Union address, Clinton explained that under his welfare plan, after providing support, job training, and child care for up to two years, anyone who can work must work “in the private sector wherever possible, in community service, if necessary.”¹²⁰ The possible reliance on “community service jobs” was repeated to the National Governors’ Association meeting a week later.¹²¹ At the end of February, Clinton simply said that “there will be a job there, and you must take it. You must go to work, but there will be a job there.”¹²² Announcing his proposal in June 1994, he mentioned those required to work would work in the private sector “if possible” or in a “subsidized job if necessary.”¹²³ The following day, Clinton clarified his view on public jobs further, saying:

if you want to require them to go to work after a certain period of time, it seems to me you have to be willing to either say they're going to do a public service job—not make-work, but work for the city or for the county—or that you will help to subsidize their job

in the private sector to make it attractive to hire them, because otherwise you'll be cutting people off benefits in areas where they will not be able to get jobs in the private sector."¹²⁴

In October of 1994, Clinton reiterated that there had to be jobs available once work requirements were enforced, again mentioning public jobs, community service jobs, and incentives for the private sector.¹²⁵ Finally, during an interview on BET in November of 1994, Clinton simply stated that "you can't tell somebody they've got to go to work unless there is work for them to do."¹²⁶

As these various comments reveal, Clinton's original plan involved instilling work requirements, but only when work was essentially assured. Throughout 1995 and 1996, however, Clinton's early concern for requiring work without guaranteeing jobs seemed to dissipate. As the various Republican proposals were made, all of which did not include any sort of guarantee of jobs, Clinton tended to focus his attack on the lack of child care provisions or what he saw as extreme measures against teen pregnancy. The few occasions that Clinton did discuss the lack of funds for jobs or job training in the Republican proposals were all during 1995. In a letter to congressional leaders concerning welfare reform released in March, for example, Clinton reiterated that the central goal of welfare reform must be moving people from welfare to work, and expressed his concern for the lack of funds for child care and job training, concluding that "[w]hen people just get cut off without going to work, that's not welfare reform." Clinton did not, however, make any mention of providing public jobs.¹²⁷ A month later, during his weekly radio address, Clinton returned to his earlier themes, briefly mentioning the need for job programs, but again stopping short of repeating his earlier condition of ensuring the availability of a job:

First, cutting costs is the primary goal of the Republican welfare bill. By arbitrarily cutting future welfare costs the Republicans get money to pay for their tax cuts. Well, I agree we need to cut costs, but we also have to be sure that when people leave welfare they have the education, training, and skills they need to get jobs, not simply to be off welfare and turn to lives of crime or to remain in poverty. If we cut child care, how can we expect mothers to go to work? If we cut job training, how will people learn to work? If we cut job programs and these people can't find jobs in the private sector, how can we require them to work? My top priority is to get people off welfare and into jobs. I want to replace welfare with work, so people earn a paycheck, not a welfare check. To do that, we have to take some of the money we save and plow it into job training, education, and child care. I want tough welfare reform, but we've got to be practical. If we're going to make people on welfare work, we have to make it possible for them to work. If we're going to make people self-reliant, we have to make it possible for them to support themselves. We can be tough, but we've got to be practical.¹²⁸

By June of 1995, Clinton's critique narrowed again. In messages on June 6 and then July 1, he focused solely on the lack of child care funds in the Republican proposals, in the latter calling child care a "crucial element" that was missing from the congressional bill.¹²⁹ When vetoing the Republican bill in December of 1995, Clinton again did not mention job training or job provisions, but focused again on the lack of child care and cuts to funds for disabled children and school lunches.¹³⁰ Throughout 1996, the existence or development of jobs for exiting welfare recipients was simply not an issue in Clinton's welfare rhetoric.

In summary, Clinton's own proposals to replace the ailing welfare system were strongly based on the reciprocal relationship between responsibility and opportunity that represented the heart of the New Democrat philosophy. The responsibility side of the equation called upon the poor to help themselves and avoid detrimental behaviors, and tended to mirror many of the traditional conservative arguments that blamed the poor for their poverty. Interestingly, however, Clinton rarely modified his catchword of responsibility with the adjectives "individual" or "personal," which would have emphasized their conservative nature more strongly. Clinton then balanced such comments with his call to provide opportunity, which mirrored a more traditional liberal perspective. Within this call for opportunity, Clinton supported a number of policies that would assist the poor in becoming more self-sufficient. Although Clinton attempted to balance both sides of the responsibility-opportunity dynamic, it is clear that the balance was not consistent in Clinton's welfare rhetoric from the 1992 campaign to the 1996 bill. Clinton tended to stay firm on his call for responsibility, but the corresponding call for opportunity seemed to decrease as time went by, especially in terms of the provision of public jobs to those recipients removed from welfare and unable to secure employment on their own. In the end, Clinton decided to sign a bill into law that did not include many of the opportunity-based provisions he had deemed critical at the beginning of his term in office. Indeed, the bill Clinton signed was actually estimated to save \$55 billion over seven years, a far cry from Clinton's original proposal, which had a price tag of additional \$9.3 billion over its first five years.

1996 PRWORA: The Rhetoric of Transformation

On August 22, 1996, Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act during a ceremony in the Rose Garden. This section focuses on the address Clinton gave during the signing ceremony. The importance of this speech is not tied to its actual impact, for few likely heard or read the speech. Rather, its importance lies in Clinton's particular framing of the potential impact of the legislation. In the speech, Clinton argued that by finally changing welfare from a vehicle of dependence to one that focused on making the poor independent, the bill would trigger a transformation of not only the poor themselves, but the entire manner in which the nation approaches the issue of poverty.

At the beginning of the speech, Clinton offered many of the same themes he had developed during the five previous years. Before the president spoke, Lillie Harden, a former welfare recipient who was actually the subject of Clinton's favorite anecdote concerning the child who was happy to have an answer to questions about his mother's employment, had addressed the audience. Clinton began his speech by once again telling her story and honoring two other former welfare recipients who "worked their way from welfare to independence." After these introductions, he re-established his typical frame for the purpose of the welfare reform:

What we are trying to do today is to overcome the flaws of the welfare system for the people who are trapped on it. We all know that the typical family on welfare today is very different from the one that welfare was designed to deal with 60 years ago. We all know that there are a lot of good people on welfare who just get off of it in the ordinary course of business, but that a significant number of people are trapped on welfare for a very long time, exiling them from the entire community of work that gives structure to our lives. Nearly 30 years ago, Robert Kennedy said, "Work is the meaning of what this country is all about. We need it as individuals, we need to sense it in our fellow citizens, and we need it as a society and as a people." He was right then, and it's right now. From now on, our nation's answer to this great social challenge will no longer be a never-ending cycle of welfare, it will be the dignity, the power and the ethic of work. Today, we are taking an historic chance to make welfare what it was meant to be: a second chance, not a way of life.

This opening statement thus included an attack on the system using the trap metaphor and the outdated claim, a limited defense of welfare recipients, and a glorification of the value of work.

Clinton then moved into his justification for signing the controversial bill, which at first attempted to situate the bill in comparison to the two that he had vetoed, rather than comparing it to the prior law or to the traditional Democratic Party position.¹³¹ Then, after mentioning the "historic chance" he was taking four separate times, Clinton launched his new strategy with the following words:

Let me also say that there's something really good about this legislation. When I sign it we have all to start again. And this becomes everyone's responsibility. After I sign my name to this bill, welfare will no longer be a political issue. The two parties cannot attack each other over it. Politicians cannot attack poor people over it. There are no encrusted habits, systems and failures that can be laid at the foot of someone else. This is not the end of welfare reform, this is the beginning. And we all have to assume responsibility.

Clinton had spent the last five years placing the blame on welfare, extolling the conservative watchwords of responsibility, and trying to rehabilitate the individual ethos of the welfare recipients. Once the bill was

signed, he essentially told America that the problem (welfare) no longer existed, and then turned the same values he had been pushing for the poor (responsibility) onto the nationwide audience.

Clinton then made a similar move with the value of work, telling the gathered crowd: Now that we are saying with this bill we expect work, we have to make sure the people have a chance to go to work. If we really value work, everybody in this society—businesses, non-profits, religious institutions, individuals, those in government—all have a responsibility to make sure the jobs are there. These three women have great stories. Almost everybody on welfare would like to have a story like that. And the rest of us now have a responsibility to give them that story. We cannot blame the system for the jobs they don't have anymore. If it doesn't work now, it's everybody's fault—mine, yours, and everybody else. There is no longer a system in the way.

Here the ideograph of work, often used before the signing as the glorified antithesis of welfare and for many practically a “code word” for threatening and blaming the “idle poor,” had now become a commodity that society owed the poor. As Clinton would later remark in his 1997 State of the Union, the soundbite that “everyone who *can work, must work*” had been transformed into “now each and every one of us has to fulfill our responsibility—indeed our moral obligation—to make sure that people who now *must work, can work.*”

The appeal of “There is no longer a system in the way” made Clinton’s argument perfectly clear: the red herring of welfare was no more. Whereas once scholars could argue that “blaming welfare for the nation’s continuing economic ills deflect[ed] attention from the failure of the market economy to provide enough work at livable wages for everyone,”¹³² Welfare, after all, was a rather inexpensive way to deal with many of the symptoms of the poverty problem (such as hunger). It rarely, however, solved the problem, and seemed to cause its share of new problems. By placing a limit on welfare, America would now be called to face the realities of the situation. In this sense, the nonpoor were perhaps as addicted to welfare as the poor supposably were.

Clinton later returned to the need for society to live up to its responsibilities, saying, “But let me say again, we have to build a new work and family system. And this is everybody's responsibility now.” He demanded that “what we have to do now is to make that work a reality.” Again, Clinton utilized the same conservative ideographs of work, family, and responsibility that were used to attack the welfare system to justify increased efforts to assist the poor. Although his arguments had changed, the overarching values used to justify them remained entirely consistent.

Clinton then told the story of a pastor in North Carolina who had agreed that he would hire welfare recipients if provided wage supplements by one of the new programs. Clinton followed the story with a broader appeal, again focusing on the responsibilities of the wider society:

I think there are people all over America like that. That's what I want all of you to be thinking about today -- what are we going to do now? This is not over, this is just beginning. The Congress deserves our thanks for creating a new reality, but we have to fill in the blanks. The governors asked for this responsibility; now they've got to live up to it. There are mayors that have responsibilities, county officials that have responsibilities. Every employer in this country that ever made a disparaging remark about the welfare system needs to think about whether he or she should now hire somebody from welfare and go to work. Go to the state and say, okay, you give me the check, I'll use it as an income supplement, I'll train these people, I'll help them to start their lives and we'll go forward from here. Every single person needs to be thinking -- every person in America tonight who sees a report of this who has ever said a disparaging word about the welfare system should now say, "Okay, that's gone. What is my responsibility to make it better?"

The anecdote of the welfare mother, therefore, had been transformed into the anecdote of the good, albeit self-interested, citizen, and the call to responsibility had clearly shifted from the poor to the nonpoor.

Lastly, in the peroration, Clinton summarized the day with a return to the soundbite that began it all:

Today, we are ending welfare as we know it. But I hope this day will be remembered not for what it ended, but for what it began -- a new day that offers hope, honors responsibility, rewards work, and changes the terms of the debate so that no one in America ever feels again the need to criticize people who are poor on welfare, but instead feels the responsibility to reach out to men and women and children who are isolated, who need opportunity, and who are willing to assume responsibility, and give them opportunity and the terms of responsibility.

After these final words, Clinton, with the three former welfare mothers at his side, signed the bill into law.

In all, four symbolic transformations took place in the speech: (1) welfare recipients were transformed from hated, isolated, dependent scapegoats into prideful, working poor striving for self-sufficiency, and thus, most importantly, from the undeserving to the deserving ranks; (2) governmental anti-poverty efforts were transformed from "welfare"—a despised system of cash benefits believed to cause dependency and undermine American values whose very title drastically swayed opinion polls—to a conglomerate of programs more firmly in tune with the positive and bipartisan values of work, responsibility, family, and opportunity; (3) the welfare debate had been transformed from a mean-spirited stalemate in which both sides employed caricatures of the other and took advantage of the voicelessness of the poor into a civilized deliberation focused on how best to move the former welfare recipients into the workforce and revitalize those areas where progress had yet to reach; and (4) the relationship between

America's poor, its nonpoor, its business world, and its government was transformed from one which the federal government merely sent a monthly stipend to the poor to one in which the entire nation was called upon to accept its responsibility and live up to the ideals of providing work and opportunity in return for responsibility.

The first two transformations reveal how Clinton sought to take advantage of both public predispositions and the framework he had established in his earlier rhetoric. Rather than challenge the hatred of welfare and the notion of the deserving/undeserving line, or attacking the middle class assumptions of the poor, Clinton worked to shift the entire situation to one that fit the dominant beliefs of the relevant audiences and took advantage of their predispositions.¹³³ Clinton's approach toward the welfare recipients especially reveals the strategic use of polling. Recall that polls had shown that 66 percent believed the government should spend *less* on welfare, while 57 percent believed the government should spend *more* on assistance to the poor, and 41 percent had a negative view of welfare recipients, but only 4 percent had a negative view of the poor. The legislation, as introduced by Clinton, had suddenly transformed the nation's welfare recipients into the nation's poor, and thus from hated to respectable, undeserving to deserving. According to Clinton advisor Dick Morris, the move was calculated to "usher in a sixties-like era of commitment to helping poor people."¹³⁴ Clinton's positive construction of the poor and the focus on the obligations of the nonpoor in the speech also worked to distract from the text of the bill itself, which was written primarily by Republicans and focused much more on controlling the negative behavior of the poor.¹³⁵

Ending welfare also removed the point of focus, and allowed Clinton to redefine the situation. Whereas before the invocation of work, responsibility, and family could be interpreted as veiled attacks on the poor, afterwards they were explicit challenges to the nonpoor to live up to their self-proclaimed ideals. Whereas before welfare undermined "mainstream values," afterwards anything less than a system that would provide sufficient and dignified jobs for the former welfare recipients could now be charged with undermining those same values. From one perspective, a "work requirement" was a harsh demand on the poor; from another, it was a guarantee of employment that obligated government and the nonpoor.

The third transformation focuses on another important aspect of Clinton's centrist style: the attempt to neutralize the polarizing effect of two party partisan politics. Many scholars have attacked the polarized state of public discourse in general and debate concerning welfare in particular.¹³⁶ By enveloping governmental anti-poverty efforts in the values of work, responsibility, and family, Clinton encouraged common ground by arguing for traditional liberal ends through traditional conservative means. In addition, by symbolically removing the scapegoat of welfare, Clinton neutralized a typical conservative tactic that often included a direct attack on the image of the poor. During the period from 1960 to 1990, somehow the public debate had shifted from a concern with how to solve the problem of poverty to one that focused on the costs and benefits of one specific proposed solution to the original problem. Unable or unwilling to

expose the fallacy of the red herring of welfare dependency, Clinton simply removed it from the debate completely. With the controversy surrounding the solution out of the picture, the debate could arguably return to the more important question of what to do about the original problem—poverty.

The final transformation speaks to much broader issues of American political culture and the meaning of citizenship. Clinton called upon the American community as a whole to confront the problems faced by the poor, especially the welfare poor who had now essentially become the part of the working poor. Interestingly, Clinton did not simply rely on this idealistic sense of duty to bring the American community together. His vision was not one that simply relied on an altruistic notion of human nature. The anecdote he told concerning the pastor receiving government incentives to hire the former welfare recipient represents an example of the historical tactic of redirecting self-interest toward the common good, an argument eloquently developed as the role of government in the *Federalist Papers*. It too represented a centrist argument that denied the extremes of expecting sufficient altruism or assuming only self-interest, and thus justified an activist view of government between the extremes of solving and causing all problems. This construct later served as the basis for Clinton's Welfare-to-Work incentive programs and his 1999 New Poverty tour.

In summary, Clinton's address at the signing ceremony revealed an important, yet subtle shift in his rhetoric of welfare. It was consistent with his pre-signing rhetoric, but considering the bill essentially "ended" welfare, the focus changed from the problems of welfare to the new challenges of the newly "liberated" and the new responsibilities on the nonpoor. Clinton could still rely heavily on the same values he had been glorifying—work, responsibility, and family. All in all, it seems like Clinton justified signing the bill even though it did not include the opportunity supporting elements he had promised earlier in his term due to the "historic chance" to transform welfare from its outdated form to one focused on work. Clinton was also told by Dick Morris that signing the bill would assure him re-election, thus the president likely believed that while he could not pass a bill at this time with a better balance of responsibility and opportunity, if he signed it now and was subsequently reelected, he could more easily provide more opportunity during the next four years.

Bill Clinton and the Dilemmas of Poverty

Due to his New Democrat philosophy, Bill Clinton was likely predisposed to addressing the dilemmas of poverty differently than his predecessors. A key aspect of the New Democrat perspective focused on moderation and the balancing of opposing values. Simply put, Clinton was more likely to not only recognize that the dilemmas existed, but would also be more comfortable discussing the dilemmas and attempting to negotiate the tensions they caused. Indeed, considering the particulars of the welfare debate, it was no surprise that welfare reform would become a key issue within Clinton's 1992 campaign

and his subsequent term in office. The welfare debate had clearly suffered from polarization in which both sides seemingly spoke past each other, seemingly oblivious of the points made by the opposition. In addition, Clinton was known as a being a “policy wonk” in general, and had extensive experience with welfare reform as governor, making it more likely that he would understand the complicated particulars of the issue. As a result, Clinton tended to speak much more to both sides of each dilemma throughout his first term.

Equality versus Freedom

Clinton’s New Democrat philosophy addressed the equality-freedom dilemma head on, though with different terminology. Rather than focus on the values of equality and freedom, however, Clinton primarily discussed the alternative values of responsibility and opportunity. The reciprocal relationship between these two values—the New Covenant—defined the basis for the role of government in general, and served as the foundation of Clinton’s vision of welfare reform in particular. By arguing that government’s role was to insure opportunity while citizens were expected to act responsibly—especially in terms of work ethic and meeting the obligations of family—Clinton was also establishing another way to balance freedom and equality. Both equality and positive freedom (“freedom to”) were served by insuring all citizens have some opportunity to succeed. Balancing the provision of opportunity with the expectation of responsibility worked to limit the role of government, and thus served negative freedom, or “freedom from.” In other words, “hard working Americans” would not be expected to carry the weight for those who choose to stay idle. The addition of responsibility thereby worked to deny notions of equal results or simple entitlement.

The primary catalyst for the development of the New Democrats and the Democratic Leadership Council was the perception by a group of primarily southern Democrats that the Democratic Party had strayed from its roots, and had either abandoned the responsibility side of the compact, or had at least allowed the Republicans to convince many Americans that they had. Thus adding more of a sense of responsibility to public policy was a key part of the New Democratic platform. In the public mind, the lack of responsibility was perhaps most evident in regard to welfare and its perceived negative impact on both the work ethic and family stability. Applied to welfare, the “simple compact” of the New Covenant thus justified both an extensive role of government as well as strict requirements on welfare recipients. In this way, the New Covenant was a return to the philosophy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, updated for a 21st century world. Clinton, like Roosevelt, rejected the dole, that “subtle destroyer of the human spirit,” for all the able-bodied, a group whose ranks had expanded considerably since 1935 as women and single parents were now common in the workforce. Of course, Roosevelt’s attack on the dole should not overshadow his determination to provide meaningful work and security for the able-bodied, which was the main thrust of

many of the New Deal programs. Clinton's original plans for welfare reform sought the same combination of resisting the dole but rewarding work, and he hoped the legacy of the 1996 bill would be that it made rewarding work more politically viable.

Deserving versus Undeserving

Clinton's depictions offered an interesting mix in terms of the deserving/undeserving line. His most important depiction, that of welfare mothers, was primarily positive but not overwhelmingly so. He worked to explain that their motivation for welfare was not based on greed or laziness but a complicated set of circumstances primarily brought about by the welfare system's perverse incentives. He also argued that their values were mainstream, especially in terms of their desire to work and raise their families. Overall, however, Clinton never attempted to identify an external attribution to the original cause of their poverty. Although Clinton never directly criticized welfare mothers, he did offer a number of indirect comments that brought their effort and past behavior into question. He consistently argued that welfare should be a "second chance, not a way of life," but he never specifically addressed the circumstances of the first chance. He also defended the children of welfare recipients by asking people not to punish them for the "sins" or "mistakes" of their parents, thereby explicitly placing the blame for the situation on something in the welfare recipient's past. Clinton basically focused on the welfare mother's future potential, rather than what may have occurred in the past. In sum, there was generally no external attribution for the original receipt of welfare, but there was an external attribution for the inability to leave, and there was substantial support for the idea that with some help, the welfare recipients could be, and wanted to be, self-sufficient.

Clinton's secondary depictions were more clearly situated on the deserving/undeserving distinction. Clinton's primary villain was the deadbeat parent, which did at times work to deflect blame from the welfare recipient. Clinton's most sympathetic figure was the poor child, which worked in the opposite manner of the deadbeat parent. The image of the poor child represents the epitome of the deserving poor, but Clinton never clearly developed the image, mainly relying on simply mentioning the existence or growth of poor children, or attacking Republican proposals due to their potential negative impact on children. Overall, considering Clinton often pitted the innocence of the poor child to the mistakes of the welfare recipient, implicating blaming the parents for the poverty of the children in the process, the net effect of invoking children may have been to decrease the sense that the welfare poor were undeserving. Clinton's last depiction of the working poor was also situated within the deserving ranks, and Clinton clearly attempted to highlight the unfairness of the fact that so many American families worked full time but remained in poverty. The sympathetic image of the working poor was key to Clinton's proposals to raise the Earned Income Tax Credit and the minimum wage, and would become even more

critical in Clinton's justification for signing the welfare bill in 1996, which transformed the welfare poor into the working poor.

Help versus Hinder

The help-hinder dilemma was perhaps the area where Clinton's expertise could best be presented. Rhetorically, he did not disappoint, as he exhibited an understanding of the government's ability to both assist and harm the poor, though he remained rather one-sidedly negative about welfare specifically. The most important point made by Clinton here was his criticism that the welfare system was outdated. Clinton's point was that as originally designed, the welfare system perhaps helped its intended audience, but as the social and economic world changed—especially in terms of women working more and the increased number of employed single parents—the system began to work against the poor. Despite having social scholars tied to the administration that would argue that while welfare certainly had its flaws, it nonetheless had some valuable positive impacts on many. Clinton was never as complimentary. He would admit that the welfare system still worked “as intended” for a few, but its primary impact had now become detrimental for most.¹³⁷ Rather than discussing any of the positive impacts of welfare, Clinton focused almost exclusively on the system's negative impact on work, family, and responsibility.

Beyond welfare, however, Clinton discussed a number of programs that could help the poor. Essentially all the various programs supported under the value of “opportunity,” including child care, job training, public jobs, and education. Following his opportunity-responsibility philosophy, Clinton often focused on programs that combined government action with citizen expectation, especially in terms of the government providing additional rewards for positive individual or social behavior. With such programs Clinton could highlight programs in which government worked as a “partner.” The EITC and minimum wage are two key examples that focused on increasing the benefit of positive behavior such as work, as well as, Clinton would argue, family and responsibility. Other programs, such as those that provide stipends to businesses that hire welfare recipients or invest in low-income areas, worked similarly to redirect self-interest toward the common good. Clinton supported a number of these programs, if not through national proposals then through allowing states the flexibility to experiment. As he promised in his signing ceremony address, Clinton focused more on such programs during his second term, like his Welfare-to-Work partnership.

Overall, Clinton's rhetoric revealed an understanding that governmental efforts can work both ways. He criticized welfare for no longer working as intended and producing perverse incentives, but then labeled other government programs as vital to his redefinition of welfare, especially those that helped “make work pay.” The key to effective social policy was often finding the right balance between providing opportunity and requiring responsibility. In a way, in following the New Democrat philosophy, Clinton

sought to revitalize progressive government by shifting effort and focus away from programs seen as wasteful or counterproductive to government programs that enjoyed both more popularity and had shown more success. Many of those tended to include a partnership between government and citizens through the use of public incentives to encourage beneficial private choices. His shift from welfare to low-wage work assistance programs like minimum wage, the EITC, and child care was perhaps the most important of these. Clinton realized that for too long welfare and its perceived failures had become a key symbolic program of “government” which had likely strongly contributed to the broad dissatisfaction of government as a whole. In this way, “ending” welfare and replacing it with more popular programs could likely have some positive overall effect on perceptions of the effectiveness of government overall.

Politics versus Policy

Lastly, the politics-policy dilemma is integral to understanding Clinton in general and especially in terms of his rhetoric of welfare. Clearly Clinton’s signing of the 1996 welfare bill generated significant controversy and caused significant backlash from the political left. In general, three viable perspectives have emerged concerning Clinton’s actions from the perspective of the tensions between politics and policy. The first is a story of institutional weakness. Here Clinton’s use of welfare reform as a tactic to regain moderate votes in the 1992 campaign backfired when the Republicans took over Congress during the mid-term elections. Clinton’s inability to remove welfare reform from the agenda or significantly alter the specifics of the Republican bill to match his original proposals thus becomes another example of the weakness of the power of the presidency in the face of congressional and popular opposition. Playing defense and fighting for his political existence, Clinton was thus “forced” to sign a bill he disagreed with in order to insure reelection and keep the office away from Republican hands. Said differently, the institutional limits of the office resulted in a situation where Clinton could not overcome the political demands of the office in order to pursue his policy goals.

The second perspective follows a similar ultimate path but tells a familiar story of political opportunism rather than institutional weakness. Clinton, playing the role of “Slick Willie,” was simply a Machiavellian intent on personal victory and devoid of principle. Clinton thus chose the issue of welfare reform during the 1992 campaign because it pandered to the beliefs of his most important target audience: the white middle class voters who had abandoned the Democratic Party. In 1996, Clinton merely remained true to form, signing the legislation in order to insure his continued political success despite any disparate policy consequences. Once again politics trumps policy, but here the blame is more individual to Clinton rather than institutional.

Although this analysis uncovers evidence that supports both these positions, perhaps the primary contribution of this analysis as a whole lies in its discernment of the third view: Clinton’s hopeful story of

pragmatism. From this perspective, Clinton originally tried to achieve both his political goals of getting elected and reconstructing the Democratic party and his policy goal of providing better assistance to the disadvantaged by making the popular promise to end welfare while, with considerably less fanfare, also supporting increased spending on the various secondary programs. With the failure of his health care reform and the Republican victory in 1994, Clinton's political goal of getting re-elected became much more difficult, and thus the politics-policy balance likely shifted toward the former. As a result, Clinton agreed to sign the welfare bill despite the considerable retreat from his original proposals (and thus his policy goals) in order to reassure re-election. At the same time, Clinton believed signing the bill into law would make the future pursuit of his policy goals much easier in terms of helping the poor, due to both the rhetorical transformation he outlined in the signing day speech, as well as the simple fact that he would be president for four more years rather than a Republican.

This third interpretation thus relies primarily on the argument that the 1996 law would change the nation's "culture of anti-poverty" from one hostile to welfare recipients into one amenable to helping the working poor. Clinton argued that such a change would not only benefit the poor, but would potentially lead to the revitalization of progressive government as a whole. Clinton's welfare legacy will ultimately depend on the long term impact of the 1996 bill on both welfare recipients and the political climate surrounding welfare and poverty issues. In the future, scholars should investigate in more detail the extent to which the four rhetorical transformations Clinton discussed in his signing day address were merely symbolic gestures that served as some form of diversion or personal rationalization, or whether the law truly managed to induce significant positive changes in the manner in which the country approaches its poorer citizens. The viability of this third perspective is examined in further detail in the concluding chapter.

Notes

¹ For information on the specifics of PRWORA, see Jeffrey L. Katz, "Clinton's Quandary: All Eyes Turned to White House as GOP prepares to Clear Big Welfare Plan," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (July 27, 1996), 2115-19; and Katz, "After 60 Years, Most Control Passing to the States," *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report* (August 3, 1996), 2190-96.

² Clinton, "Remarks by the President at the Signing of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act," *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1996, Vol. II*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 1328-30. Earlier appearance of the "end welfare as we know it" comment found occurred in Clinton, "The New Covenant: Address to Students at Georgetown University," *Democratic Leadership Council* <www.dlcppi.org/speeches/91newcov.htm> (October 23, 1991).

³ Peter L. Kilborn, "With Welfare Overhaul Now Law, States Grapple with the Consequences," *New York Times*, August 23, 1996; Jason DeParle, "The Silence of the Liberals: Conservatives are Running the Poverty Debate. Here's Why Liberals Should Join It," *Washington Monthly*, April 1999, 12. A widely cited Urban Institute study was released on July 26, 1996, which estimated the new bill would force 2.6

million people below the poverty line, of which 1.1 million would be children. See Sheila Zedlewski, Sanda Clark, Eric Meier, and Keith Watson. "Potential Effects of Congressional Welfare Reform Legislation on Family Incomes." *The Urban Institute* <<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=406622>> (July 26, 1996).

- ⁴ Quotations from Representative Charles B. Rangel from Harlem cited in Jerry Gray, "The Welfare Bill: The Liberals," *New York Times*, August 1, 1996, 23; Christopher Dodd, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee cited in Francis X. Clines, "Clinton Signs Bill Cutting Welfare; States in New Role," *New York Times*, August 23, 1996, 1; Marion Wright Edelman, chairwomen of the Children's Defense League, cited in Clines, "Clinton Bill Cutting Welfare," 1; and Edward Kennedy, cited in Peter Edelman, "The Worst Thing Clinton Has Done," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1997, 45.
- ⁵ Robert Pear, "The Welfare Bill: The Overview," *New York Times*, August 1, 1996. Jonathon Alter, "Washington Washes Its Hands," *Newsweek*, August 12, 1996, 42.
- ⁶ Reich's telling biography of Clinton's first term paints a compelling picture of the inner sanctum negotiations. Clinton would gather all his advisors, and "poll" each one by one. Reich described his response to Clinton's query as follows: "It's my turn, and I can't think of anything to say except that the whole purpose of coming to Washington four years ago was to reverse the trend toward widening inequality in wealth and opportunity, and that signing this bill would violate everything we stood for. I don't know if B [Clinton] is listening. What I don't say is this: *You're twenty points ahead in the polls, for chrissake. You don't need to hurt people this way. You don't need to settle for this piece of shit. Veto it, and explain to the public why you did. Explain that you want to get poor people into jobs, and that to do so requires money. . . . That's the whole point of being elected, isn't it? Why else do you want to be president? Simply to be president? . . .* I'm certain B has decided to sign the welfare bill, and I feel sick to my stomach. There's no point to winning reelection if it has to be done this way. . . . none of this is enough to justify hurting vulnerable people. None of it is worth the price of a million more children in poverty." Robert Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 331. Stephanopoulos' best-selling "tell-all" revealed a similar position. See Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), 419-22.
- ⁷ Dick Morris, *Behind the Oval Office: Getting Reelected Against All Odds* (Los Angeles: Renaissance Books, 1999), 300.
- ⁸ Quoted in Alter, "Washington Washes its Hands," 42.
- ⁹ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1993* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1994), 373.
- ¹⁰ Clinton, "The New Covenant."
- ¹¹ Jeffrey L. Katz, "Clinton's Changing Welfare Views," *Congressional Quarterly* (July 27, 1996), 2116.
- ¹² Ed Gillespie and Bob Schellhas, eds., *Contract With America* (New York: Times Books, 1994), 65.
- ¹³ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac 1994* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly News Features, 1995), 1-3.
- ¹⁴ In his autobiography of his time in the Clinton White House, Robert Reich criticized Clinton's "silence on welfare" as having the effect of "emboldening those who are cooking up a cruel bill, undermining his potential allies." See Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet*, 268.
- ¹⁵ For additional details, see Jeffrey L. Katz, "Provisions of Welfare Bill," *Congressional Quarterly* (August 3, 1996), 2191-2194.
- ¹⁶ Original members included Virginia Gov. Charles S. Robb, Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt, Sen. Sam Nunn (Ga.) and Rep. Richard A. Gephardt (Mo.) See Dan Balz and David S. Broder, "Rival Democratic Councils Forming," *Washington Post*, February 27, 1985, A7.

- ¹⁷ Stanley Greenberg, *Middle Class Dreams: The Politics and Power of the New American Majority* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 110.
- ¹⁸ Clinton, "Keynote Address, Democratic Leadership Conference Convention in Cleveland, Ohio," *New Democrats Online*. < http://www.ndol.org/ndol_ci.cfm?contentid=3166&kaid=86&subid=194> (May 6, 1991).
- ¹⁹ Kenneth Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 169.
- ²⁰ Clinton, "New Covenant."
- ²¹ Clinton, "Nomination Acceptance Address," *New York Times*, July 17, 1992, A14.
- ²² Clinton, "First Inaugural," *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1993, Vol. I*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 2.
- ²³ Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1994, Vol. I*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 129.
- ²⁴ Reich, *Work of Nations*.
- ²⁵ Clinton, "Remarks on the Earned-Income Tax Credit and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers, 1994, Vol. I*, 411.
- ²⁶ Citations of 40 hrs – not in poverty. 1992 Presidential Debate, October 11, 1992.
- ²⁷ See for example, Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 117; Clinton, "Remarks to the Cleveland City Club," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 608; Clinton, "Remarks at a Town Meeting in San Diego," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 682; Clinton, "Remarks to Students at Wilbur Wright College in Chicago," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 335; Clinton, "Remarks to the Governor's Leadership Conference in New York City," *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1994, Vol. II*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995), 1801; Clinton, "Remarks to the Democratic National Committee," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 70; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1995, Vol I*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996), 79.
- ²⁸ See, for example, James R. Kluegal, and Eliot R. Smith, *Beliefs About Inequality: Americans' Views of What Is and What Ought to Be* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986); Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Heather E. Bullock, "Class Acts: Middle-Class Responses to the Poor," in *The Social Psychology of Interpersonal Discrimination*, ed. Bernice Lott and Diane Maluso (New York: Guilford Press, 1995).
- ²⁹ Gwen Iffil, "The 1992 Campaign: Clinton's Standard Campaign Speech: A Call for Responsibility," *New York Times*, April 26, 1992, 24.
- ³⁰ See, for example, Clinton, "Remarks on Arrival in San Diego, California," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 677; Clinton, "Remarks at Fredericktown Village in Frederick," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 805.
- ³¹ Clinton, "Teleconference Remarks to the National Association of County Officials," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 1108.
- ³² Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 156.
- ³³ See Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 32.

- ³⁴ For examples of Clinton referring to welfare as a trap, see Clinton, “Remarks on Signing the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 50; Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 117; Clinton, “Remarks at a Presidential Dinner in Miami, Florida,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 516; Clinton, “Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1077; Clinton, “Remarks to Ford Motor Company Employees in Dearborn, Michigan,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1729. For examples Clinton framing his reform plan as “liberation” of welfare recipients, see Clinton, “Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 451; Clinton, “Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 142; Clinton, “Remarks at a Rally for Democratic Candidates in Seattle, Washington,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1844; Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 79; Clinton, “Remarks on Departure From Jacksonville,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1995, Vol. II*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996) 1383. Clinton referred to removing the “shackles” in Clinton, “Remarks to the Cleveland City Club,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 602.
- ³⁵ See, for example, Clinton, “Remarks to General Motors Employees in Shreveport, Louisiana,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 204; Clinton, “Remarks to the American Society of Association Executives,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 396; Clinton, “Remarks at a Presidential Dinner in Miami, Florida,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 516; Clinton, “Remarks in a Health Care Roundtable in Topeka,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 606; Clinton, “Remarks to Ameritech Employees in Milwaukee, Wisconsin,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 710; Clinton, “Remarks to Pathmark Employees in New York City,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 865; Clinton, “The President's Radio Address,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1144.
- ³⁶ Numerous examples of such claim can be cited. Clinton specifically used the terms “hate” and “absolutely dying to get out” in Clinton, “Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 142; and Clinton, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session on the National Performance Review in Houston, Texas,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1993, Vol. II*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 1474, respectively.
- ³⁷ Clinton, “Remarks to the Cleveland City Club,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 608.
- ³⁸ Clinton, “The President's Radio Address,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2170; Clinton, “Roundtable Discussion With Students on Student Loans at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1340.
- ³⁹ Clinton, “Roundtable Discussion With Students on Student Loans at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1340.
- ⁴⁰ Clinton, “Remarks to the National Association of Realtors,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, William J. Clinton, 1996, Vol. I*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 646.
- ⁴¹ See, for example, Clinton, “Interview With the Wisconsin Media,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1125; Clinton, “Remarks to General Motors Employees in Shreveport, Louisiana,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 203; Clinton, “Remarks to the Community in Atlanta, Georgia,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 818; Clinton, “Interview with Ed Gordon of Black Entertainment Television and a Question-and-Answer Session,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1945.
- ⁴² See, for example, Clinton, “Remarks to Senior Citizens in North Miami Beach,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1389; Clinton, “Remarks at a Democratic Dinner in Jersey City, New Jersey,” *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 702; and Clinton, “Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1079.
- ⁴³ Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 129.
- ⁴⁴ Clinton, “The President's Radio Address,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1043.

- ⁴⁵ Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 80. Also see Clinton, "Remarks by President Clinton to National Governors Association" *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1185.
- ⁴⁶ Clinton referred to "past sins" in Clinton, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas, Texas," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 477; Clinton, "Remarks to the California Democratic Party in Sacramento," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 497. He referred to "past mistakes" in Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 537; and Clinton, "The President's News conference," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 542. Teen pregnancy was an issue from the beginning of the Clinton presidency, as he called it an epidemic only two days after his first inaugural. See Clinton, "Reproductive Health and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 9. Reducing teen pregnancy was also identified as one of the key "principles and values" at the core of welfare reform. See Clinton, "Letter to Congressional Leaders on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 375. In January of 1996, Clinton began the National Campaign to Reduce Teen Pregnancy. See, Clinton, "Remarks Announcing the National Campaign To Reduce Teen Pregnancy," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 111-113.
- ⁴⁷ See Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 223.
- ⁴⁸ For example, Clinton often merely used the adjective "innocent" to modify "children" or "babies" in his speeches. See Clinton, "Remarks at a Fundraising Dinner in Somerset, New Jersey," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 926; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1064; Clinton, "Remarks at a Democratic Luncheon in Detroit, Michigan," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 364; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1043.
- ⁴⁹ Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 114; and Clinton, "Remarks to Senior Citizens in North Miami Beach," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1392.
- ⁵⁰ Clinton, "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas, Texas," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 477.
- ⁵¹ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 493.
- ⁵² The paragraph was: "And it's wrong to cut children off just because their mothers are minor. After all, a child is a child, a baby is a baby. Whether they're white or black or brown, whether they're born in or out of wedlock, every child deserves a chance to make a good life. Surely we should not punish children for the mistakes of their parents. Instead, we ought to give them a chance to become independent, full participating citizens, not part of the welfare population." Clinton, "The President's News Conference," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 542.
- ⁵³ Clinton, "Inaugural Address," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 1; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 114; Clinton, "Remarks on the Economic Program in Hyde Park, New York," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 137; Clinton, "Remarks Honoring UNICEF Health Heroes," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 2196.
- ⁵⁴ Clinton compared the changes to elderly and child poverty on a number of occasions, including: Clinton, "Remarks on the Economic Program in Hyde Park, New York," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 137; Clinton, "Remarks to the Children's Defense Fund Conference," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 273; Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 114.
- ⁵⁵ Clinton, "Remarks to the Children's Defense Fund Conference," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 273. Clinton also mentioned children as the "new poor" in Clinton, "Remarks Honoring UNICEF Health Heroes," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 2196; and Clinton, "Remarks at the Democratic Congressional Dinner," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 742; and Clinton, "Remarks to the White House Conference on Aging," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 629.

- ⁵⁶ Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association Summit on Young Children in Baltimore, Maryland," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 824.
- ⁵⁷ Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association in Burlington, Vermont," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1182.
- ⁵⁸ Clinton, "Remarks to Senior Citizens in North Miami Beach," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1392; and Clinton, "Remarks to the Community at the Little Sisters of the Poor Home for the Aged in Denver," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1405.
- ⁵⁹ See, for example, Clinton, "Interview With Religious Affairs Journalists," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 147; Clinton, "Remarks to the California Democratic Party in Sacramento," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 497; Clinton, "Letter to Congressional Leaders on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1314; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1334.
- ⁶⁰ Clinton, "Remarks in a Town Meeting in Cranston, Rhode Island," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 887.
- ⁶¹ See, for example, Clinton, "Remarks to the National League of Cities," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 339; Clinton, "Statement on House of Representatives Action on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 394; Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1234.
- ⁶² Clinton mentioned the "most wanted" in Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Denver," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1174; as well as in Clinton, "Statement on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1208. For the "criminals" comment, see Clinton, "Statement on the United States District Court Decision on the Child Support Recovery Act," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1271. For the "nowhere to hide" comment, see Clinton, "Remarks to the American Nurses Association," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 926.
- ⁶³ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 373.
- ⁶⁴ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 373.
- ⁶⁵ See, for example, Clinton, "Remarks to the National League of Cities," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 339; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 373; Clinton, "Letter to Congressional Leaders on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 375.
- ⁶⁶ Clinton, "Remarks on the Economic Program," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 1252; and Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1254.
- ⁶⁷ Clinton, "Teleconference Remarks to the National Association of County Officials," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1107.
- ⁶⁸ Clinton, "Interview With the Louisiana Media," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1130.
- ⁶⁹ Clinton, "Remarks on the Earned-Income Tax Credit and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1225.
- ⁷⁰ See, for example, Clinton, "Interview With the New York and New Jersey Media," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1159; Clinton, "Interview With the Texas Media," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1220; Clinton, "Remarks to the National Urban League," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1331; Clinton, "Remarks at the Summer of Service Forum in College Park, Maryland," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1420.
- ⁷¹ Clinton, "Remarks to the Conference on the Future of the American Workplace in Chicago, Illinois," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1181.
- ⁷² Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 129.

- ⁷³ Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 82. Clinton made similar statements in Clinton, "Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 142; and Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Mason City, Iowa," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 223.
- ⁷⁴ For example, in April of 1996, Clinton said: "I'll say again: If we're going to have family values coming out of Washington, we should start by valuing families that are working hard, staying off welfare, doing their best to raise their children. They're living by the values we say we all believe in, and it's harder for them than it is for most of the rest of us. I say it's time to give them a hand up; they don't want a handout, just a hand up." See Clinton, "Remarks to the Service Employees International Union Convention," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 627.
- ⁷⁵ Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Mason City, Iowa," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 223. Clinton made similar comments in Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Keene, New Hampshire," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 289.
- ⁷⁶ Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Keene, New Hampshire," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 289; Clinton, "Remarks to the Community in Taylor, Michigan," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 358; Clinton, "Remarks at a Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee Dinner in New York City," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 431; Clinton, "Statement on Congressional Inaction on Minimum Wage Legislation," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 522.
- ⁷⁷ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 527.
- ⁷⁸ Clinton, "Remarks on Senate Action on Minimum Wage Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1095.
- ⁷⁹ Clinton cited in Gwen Iffil, "The 1992 Campaign: Clinton's Standard Campaign Speech: A Call for Responsibility," *New York Times*, April 26, 1992, 24; Clinton, "Remarks on the 'Reemployment Act of 1994,'" *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 414.
- ⁸⁰ See *Annenberg/Pew Archive of Presidential Campaign Discourse*, CD-Rom (Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 2000).
- ⁸¹ Clinton explained, for example, that "No one likes the welfare system" in Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 32; that "Every American wants this" in Clinton, "Remarks to the National League of Cities," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2139; that "nobody likes the system," in Clinton, "Remarks to the Cleveland City Club," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 608; that "overwhelming majorities" disliked it in Clinton, "The President's News Conference," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1824; that "everyone agrees the system is broken and it needs to be fixed," in Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 109; that "the American people desperately want a change in the welfare system," in Clinton, "Remarks to the Democratic National Committee," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 70; and that "Everybody in America wants to reform the welfare system," in Clinton, "Remarks to the Florida State Legislature in Tallahassee," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 424.
- ⁸² Clinton, "Remarks to the Governor's Leadership Conference in New York City," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1801.
- ⁸³ Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 129.
- ⁸⁴ Clinton most often relied on the point that welfare "undermined" American values, as he did in Clinton, "Remarks to the Disabled American Veterans Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1214; Clinton, "Remarks in Daytona Beach, Florida," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1906; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2170; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 79; Clinton, "The

President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 109, among others. Other comments include that the welfare system "did not honor" American values in Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1334; that the welfare system was "inconsistent" with American values in Clinton, "Remarks at a Clinton/Gore '96 Dinner in Los Angeles, California," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1445; and that the welfare system "teaches the wrong values, [and] rewards the wrong choices" in Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association Conference," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1128.

- ⁸⁵ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2170. Other similar comments include: "There's no greater gap between our good intentions and our misguided consequences than you see in the welfare system," from Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1076; and "There's no greater gap between mainstream American values and Government than the failed welfare system," from Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 492.
- ⁸⁶ Clinton, "President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1334. Similar comments include: "A long time ago I concluded that the current welfare system undermines the basic values of work, responsibility, and family, trapping generation after generation in dependency and hurting the very people it was designed to help," from Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1233; "It's a system so badly broken that it undermines the very values, work, family, and responsibility, people must have to put themselves back on track. We've got to return those values front and center," from Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 109; "the system is broken badly, and it undermines the very values, work, family and responsibility, that people need to put themselves back on track," from Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2170; "[the current system] undermines our basic values of work, responsibility, and family," from Clinton, "Statement on Proposed Welfare Reform Legislation," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1196.
- ⁸⁷ Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 79.
- ⁸⁸ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 141; Clinton, "Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 451; Clinton, "Remarks at a Children's Town Meeting," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 491; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 687.
- ⁸⁹ Clinton, "Remarks at the Summer of Service Forum in College Park, Maryland," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1420.
- ⁹⁰ Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1076.
- ⁹¹ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2170.
- ⁹² Clinton, "Remarks to the Governor's Leadership Conference in New York City," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1801.
- ⁹³ Clinton, "Remarks to the National League of Cities," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2139; and Clinton, "Remarks to the National Association of Counties," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 369.
- ⁹⁴ See Clinton, "Exchange With Reporters on Air Force One," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1459; and Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1237.
- ⁹⁵ Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform Legislation and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1234.
- ⁹⁶ For two examples of each, see Clinton, "Remarks at the Democratic Governors' Association Dinner," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 29; Clinton, "Remarks to the Cleveland City Club," *Public Papers 1996*,

Vol. I, 608; Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 34; Clinton, "Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 451; Clinton, "Teleconference Remarks With the National League of Cities," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2140; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 117.

⁹⁷ Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association Summit on Young Children in Baltimore, Maryland," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 820; and Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1078.

⁹⁸ Clinton, "Remarks to the Governor's Leadership Conference in New York City," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1801.

⁹⁹ Clinton, "New Covenant;" Clinton, "Nomination Acceptance," *New York Times*, July 17, 1992, A14; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 129; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 79. Clinton labeled the phrase a "hard simple rule" during the 1995 State of the Union.

¹⁰⁰ Clinton, "Remarks on the Earned-Income Tax Credit and an Exchange With Reporters," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1225.

¹⁰¹ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. I*, 774.

¹⁰² See, for example, Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," February 2, 1993, 34; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 2; Clinton, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 134; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 2170; Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 108.

¹⁰³ See, for example, Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 156; Clinton, "Remarks at the New England Presidential Dinner in Boston," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 451.

¹⁰⁴ Clinton, "Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Welfare Reform Legislation," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1112.

¹⁰⁵ Clinton, "Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1077.

¹⁰⁶ Clinton, "Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Welfare Reform Legislation," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1112.

¹⁰⁷ Clinton, "Statement on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1219.

¹⁰⁸ Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association in Burlington, Vermont," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1182; Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1334. Also see Clinton, "Statement on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1219.

¹⁰⁹ Clinton, "Remarks to the Conference on the Future of the American Workplace in Chicago, Illinois," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1181.

¹¹⁰ Clinton, "Address to the Nation on the Economic Program," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1323; and Clinton, "Remarks to the Democratic Leadership Council," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 2096.

¹¹¹ Clinton, "The President's News Conference," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 871;

Clinton, "Remarks to the National Education Association in San Francisco, California," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1011; Clinton, "Remarks on the Economic Program," *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1253.

- ¹¹² Clinton, “Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session With the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Dallas, Texas,” *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 481.
- ¹¹³ Clinton and Al Gore, *Putting People First: How We Can All Change America* (New York: Times Books, 1992), 165.
- ¹¹⁴ In his book, Stephanopoulos wrote, “In 1992, I had been eager to put millions of dollars of television advertising behind the phrase ‘end welfare as we know it,’ even though I knew full well that it sent a message far more powerful than, and somewhat contradictory to, the fine print of our proposal in *Putting People First*, which had promised more assistance to welfare recipients looking for work, not less.” See Stephanopoulos, *All Too Human: A Political Education* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 421. In an entry in his autobiography dated March 22, 1994, Reich wrote: “I’m now sure we made a mistake during the campaign. Instead of talking about welfare reform as ‘two years and out,’ we should have used the phrase ‘two years and work.’ . . . But the campaign phrase has taken on a life of its own, and I don’t have a good feeling about where that life might end. . . . When the knives come out, the poor won’t be able to defend themselves against the big middle-class and wealthy entitlements. Under the banner of ‘two years and out,’ we might end up with millions of poor children on the streets.” See Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 159.
- ¹¹⁵ While not directly related to welfare reform, Clinton also seemed to retreat from earlier concerns about redefining the unemployment system to become a reemployment system due to the decrease in manufacturing jobs. From October 1993 to October 1994, Clinton discussed “reemployment” often, despite not passing in significant legislation in the area. Afterwards, the subject was rarely addressed. Considering one of the first possible barriers to moving people from welfare to work would be the existence of job, the retreat should also be considered significant.
- ¹¹⁶ In February of 1993, for example, Clinton explained his proposal as follows: “I will come forward later this year with a welfare reform proposal that will literally end welfare as we know it, will say we’ll have education and training and child care and health care. After 2 years you’ve either got to go to work or do public service work to draw an income tax from the Government. See “Remarks to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce National Business Action Rally,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 192. In May of 1993, he again mentioned the provision of public service jobs, saying: “Now, the flip side of that is if after 2 years on welfare and going through the education program you don’t have a job, then everybody under my plan would be required to go to work, either in a private sector job or a public sector job, in order to continue to draw the check.” See, Clinton, “Remarks at a Town Meeting in San Diego,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 683.
- ¹¹⁷ Clinton then continued, saying, “So we have two tasks. One is to develop the capacity of the American people to perform without regard to race or income or the circumstances of their birth. The other is to make sure that there are some opportunities for them to bring to bear for their talent and to be rewarded with a paycheck. It is a great challenge.” See Clinton, “Remarks at the Summer Jobs Conference in Arlington, Virginia,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. I*, 431.
- ¹¹⁸ Clinton, “Interview With the Wisconsin Media,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1126.
- ¹¹⁹ Clinton, “Interview With the Wisconsin Media,” *Public Papers 1993, Vol. II*, 1127.
- ¹²⁰ Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 129.
- ¹²¹ Clinton, “Remarks to the National Governors’ Association,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 156.
- ¹²² Clinton, “Remarks to Students at Wilbur Wright College in Chicago,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 335.
- ¹²³ Clinton, “Remarks on Welfare Reform in Kansas City, Missouri,” *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1078.

- ¹²⁴ Clinton, "Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Iowa Attorney General Bonnie Campbell," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. I*, 1084.
- ¹²⁵ Clinton, "Interview With Mark Riley and Laura Blackburne of WLIB Radio, New York City," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1791.
- ¹²⁶ Clinton, "Interview with Ed Gordon of Black Entertainment Television and a Question-and-Answer Session," *Public Papers 1994, Vol. II*, 1944.
- ¹²⁷ Clinton, "Letter to Congressional Leaders on Welfare Reform," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 375.
- ¹²⁸ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 492.
- ¹²⁹ Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1043. In his June 6 remarks to the NGA, Clinton explained that "It defies common sense to insist that people go to work when they have very young children if doing so will actually cost them money," but did not mention the lack of job training or job creation funds. See Clinton, "Remarks to the National Governors' Association Summit on Young Children in Baltimore, Maryland," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. I*, 821.
- ¹³⁰ Clinton, "Remarks on Vetoing Budget Reconciliation Legislation," *Public Papers 1995, Vol. II*, 1852.
- ¹³¹ He attacked the bill as being "far from perfect" but admitted that "it has come a very long way." Invoking the prior bills explicitly, he continued, "Congress sent me two previous bills that I strongly believe failed to protect our children and did too little to move people from welfare to work. I vetoed both of them. This bill had broad bipartisan support and is much, much better on both counts." Clinton then mentioned some of the specifics of the bill, including the additional four billion money to be spent on child care, though such a sum paled in comparison to the \$55 billion the bill was designed to save overall. Clinton then focused on how the bill "preserves the national safety net of food stamps and school lunches. It drops the deep cuts and the devastating changes in child protection, adoption, and help for disabled children. It preserves the national guarantee of health care for poor children, the disabled, the elderly, and people on welfare -- the most important preservation of all." Each of these comparisons are toward the original two bills he vetoed. In essence, Clinton was defending his support for the bill on the basis that the bill had not cut too many programs from the prior law. Following the specifics he supported, Clinton turned to some of the specific provision he opposed, including "nutritional cuts" and cuts in programs for legal immigrants, arguing that they were simply measures to help balance the budget rather than reform welfare. Despite these problems, Clinton argued that he could not pass up what he termed a "historic chance to try and recreate the nation's social bargain with the poor" and "try to change the parameters of the debate." See Clinton, "Statement on Signing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996," *Public Papers 1996, Vol. II*, 1329.
- ¹³² Ann Withorn, "Why Do They Hate Me So Much? A History of Welfare and its Abandonment in the United States," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 66 (1996), 507.
- ¹³³ Such a strategy has been entitled the use of "heresthetic" by William Riker and "tacking" by Dick Morris. Opponents of such a strategy would likely use terms such as "pandering," but, once again, the tension between the political and policy goals must not be dismissed. Clinton relied on prior public opinion, but he utilized that opinion to justify policies that otherwise may not have been supported. See Riker, *The Art of Manipulation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 9, and Dick Morris, *Behind the Oval Office*, 83-4. Morris builds an interesting metaphor of sailing to characterize Clinton's use of public opinion polling. See Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet*, 280, for a powerful attack on Morris' strategy of tacking.
- ¹³⁴ Morris, *Behind the Oval Office*, 302.
- ¹³⁵ The bill itself included several provisions that focused on the behavior of the poor, including allowing the denial of assistance to children bore to welfare recipients and individuals convicted of drug offenses, requiring unwed parents under the age of 18 to live at home and attend school, as well as establish

paternity. For the specifics of the bill's provisions, see Katz, "After 60 Years, Most Control Is Passing to States," 2190-96.

¹³⁶ See, for example, James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991); Robert Hughes, *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Elizabeth Drew argued that the House debate on welfare reform was "uglier than any in memory" as Democrats invoked Hitler and "Republicans likened welfare recipients to animals." See Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Touchstone, 1994), 145.

¹³⁷ By "as intended," Clinton seemed to be implying that the welfare system worked properly when it was only used temporarily, to "get people back on their feet." Clinton would contrast that sort of welfare receipt with long-term and inter-generational receipt. This characterization was flawed, however, as welfare's original intended purpose was not short-term receipt, but to provide long term care to unemployables.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

From 1963 to 1996, five American presidents waded into the murky waters of enduring American paradoxes and placed welfare or poverty near the top of their political agendas. The first, Lyndon Johnson, promised an end to poverty in the United States, and the last, Bill Clinton, promised to end welfare as it was known. The former was unable to complete his charge, the latter, at least to some extent, did. In between, three presidents were primarily met with frustration as they tried to reform a welfare system that suffered from almost universal disapproval.

This longitudinal analysis of the rhetorical efforts of these five presidents on behalf of their policies reveals a number of important insights. Six key points are offered and supported here in the conclusion: 1. All five presidents invoked essentially the same ideal of equal opportunity and, to a lesser extent, the concept of living wages. 2. After Lyndon Johnson, poverty as an issue became an afterthought, whereas welfare and its negative impact dominated discussion of these issues. 3. The presidential discussion of welfare and its impacts were consistently one-sided and tied more closely with questionable public opinion rather than scholarly analysis. 4. The presidents presented a wide variety of relevant characters, but overall expressed rather similar positions on the main distinctions. The presidents were generally sympathetic to unemployables, the unemployed, and the working poor; mostly avoided discussing poor children; and primarily focused upon a mixed image of the welfare poor that while predominately negative was also rather hopeful. 5. Seen through the lens of the four paradoxes of poverty, it is clear that the presidents as a whole were out of balance toward hinder rather than help, and, to a lesser extent, toward undeserving rather than deserving, while the ideal of equal opportunity expressed by the presidents worked to balance equality and freedom. The potential impact of the obvious gap between this ideal and the real, however, was neutralized by the focus on the hindering aspect of welfare and the undeserving nature of welfare recipients. As a result, the policy-politics dilemma was often negotiated through a more conservative path. 6. As argued by Clinton, the 1996 welfare law should have the effect of significantly altering the rhetoric and politics of welfare and poverty, essentially removing the red herring of welfare and the accompanying undeserving image of the idle poor and shifting the focus back to poverty and the more sympathetic image of the working poor. To support these six conclusions, I will review and analyze the findings of the earlier chapters by returning once more to the four paradoxes of poverty.

Equality and Freedom: The Universal Ideal of Equal Opportunity

The first key finding of this analysis is that all five presidents essentially invoked the same ideal—equal opportunity—and, for the most part, supported a rather significant role for government to fulfill that ideal. The presidents varied in the degree of specificity applied to the concept of equal opportunity, but nonetheless they all seemed to support the idea that everyone should have the opportunity to succeed. True to the overriding individualism dominant in American ideology, this ideal was often closely associated with the expectation that every American also had the responsibility to work to realize this ideal. The distinction between equal opportunity and equal results, therefore, was to lie in individual effort.

The ideal of equal opportunity represents a natural balance between the competing American values of freedom and equality. To offer equal opportunity to all is to provide equality by offering positive freedom at a hopefully minimal cost of negative freedom. Said differently, the government should only violate the freedom of individuals enough to insure equal opportunity for all. Both political parties agree on the ideal of equal opportunity, they only differ in terms of the manner and degree of governmental action to insure it. That question is in turn clearly influenced by beliefs concerning the degree to which equal opportunity is naturally provided by the market, and the degree to which government unnaturally adds barriers to equal opportunity.

Of the five presidents examined in this study, Lyndon Johnson by far was the most focused on the gap between the ideal of equal opportunity and the reality for America's poor. Johnson attacked the hypocrisy of a rich nation with such ideals accepting continued poverty. He expressed the goal of providing every person who wanted a job and was willing to work with a "chance to get a decent job" and the "right to earn a living." He defined the "fundamental objective of the nation" as providing full and fair opportunity for all citizens to develop to the best of their abilities. Johnson clearly envisioned a critical role of government, in particular the federal government, in fulfilling these goals. To Johnson, the primary purpose of government was to expand and insure opportunity. Based on these beliefs, Johnson declared his War on Poverty. To Johnson, in sum, equality was being violated due to the very existence of poverty.

Richard Nixon expressed a similar overriding ideal as Johnson, but differed in terms of his perception of the gap between the ideal and the real, and the best way to close that gap. Like Johnson, Nixon argued that government had a clear role in providing an "equal chance at the starting line" and that everyone should have a chance to go as high as their talents can take them. Nixon agreed that the goal was to guarantee an opportunity and a fair chance to be rewarded for work. Nixon disagreed with Johnson's attack on American hypocrisy, however. Nixon glorified the American free enterprise system for the results it had achieved, bragging that the United States had more income equality than any other nation. Nixon recognized that a gap still existed, but it was not as drastic or shameful as Johnson had framed it. In

addition, Nixon added to Johnson's late attack on the negative impact of the welfare system and placed significant blame on that system, as well as its recipients, for the gap. As a result, the immediate role of government to insure equal opportunity shifted away from providing opportunity in terms of education, training, better environments, and less discrimination, and more to reducing the negative impacts of welfare and rehabilitating the idle poor.

Jimmy Carter's rhetoric in this area was somewhat inconsistent. The most distinctive aspect of Carter's rhetoric concerning the role of government involved his cautiousness. Carter spoke often of the limits of government and the need for more efficiency and competence. On the other hand, Carter not only supported the ideal of equal opportunity, but at times he expressed that abstract ideal in a much more concrete manner than his predecessors. Specifically, Carter argued for a guarantee that every family with a full time worker would earn adequate wages to finance a family—known as a living wage—as well as a guarantee of a job for at least one person in every family. He argued that a job was a basic human right. At times, however, he softened these guarantees, offering instead an “opportunity” for a job to all those that were able-bodied. Carter's inconsistency also showed in his actions surrounding the Full Employment Act. Carter signed the bill, but his lack of support during its path through Congress likely contributed to its status as primarily a symbolic gesture with little policy impact. Carter also did not spend much political capital exposing the gap between these ideals and reality. Curiously, he did at one point reveal the extent to which the working poor were making insufficient funds, but that remained only one brief exception to his usual focus. Indeed, Carter, like Nixon, focused much more on the evils of welfare than the problem of poverty. Nonetheless, Carter's call for guaranteed jobs for all the able-bodied and his call for that job to provide a wage sufficient enough to support a family were very strong and specific expressions of the ideal of equal opportunity.

Ronald Reagan's anti-government ideology was clear from the beginning, but he nonetheless supported the same ideal. Reagan argued that guaranteeing equal opportunity was within the legitimate role of government. Equal opportunity was identified as a “hallmark” and “principle” of the nation. While Reagan accepted that ideal and perhaps even the gap between the ideal and real, his focus was clearly on placing blame for the gap upon government itself. The welfare system and its connection to dependency was perhaps his strongest example. Reagan's ideology was a return to the pre-New Deal laissez-faire ideology that equal opportunity would naturally be provided by the free enterprise system, with some assistance from volunteers and community ties, as long as government did not interfere. The role of government, therefore, was to get out of the way.

Lastly, Bill Clinton's New Democrat philosophy placed considerable focus on reconceptualizing equal opportunity. Clinton's opportunity-responsibility dyad worked primarily to emphasize the importance of individual responsibility to the workings of equal opportunity, in part because of the Democratic Party's perceived abdication of such responsibility. By placing such a renewed focus on

individual responsibility, however, the New Democrats believed they could in turn reinvigorate the call for opportunity. Indeed, Clinton often invoked the need to live up to the “American dream,” and, like Carter, Clinton often put a concrete face on equal opportunity by establishing the specific ideal that any family with a full time worker should earn enough to pull the family out of poverty. Unlike Carter, however, Clinton was very consistent in the expression of the ideal, repeating it again and again throughout his first term. Clinton also spent considerable effort in exposing the gap between this ideal and the fact millions of American families lived in poverty despite a full-time worker. Although he was unable to achieve that ideal, he did move the country closer to it with the expansion of the EITC and increases to the minimum wage, and in his second term with the increase in medical care to the children of the working poor, child tax credits, and Welfare-to-Work programs. Like his predecessors, Clinton also placed significant blame on the welfare system for causing dependency and thus violating equal opportunity, although he did temper this criticism somewhat by spreading part of the blame to the relative value of low-wage work compared to welfare.

In sum, all five presidents, whether Republican or Democrat, expressed the same high ideal of equal opportunity for all Americans. They differed on how close the nation was to realizing that ideal and how best to close the gap, but nonetheless recognized an overall role for government in seeking that ideal. Equal opportunity is an abstract ideal, but both Carter and Clinton did provide concrete manifestations of it, arguing that families with full time workers should earn enough to escape poverty. This goal, also known as a living wage, is strongly supported by the American public in opinion polls, with polls on the question returning over ninety percent agreement.¹ The importance of the consistency with which this ideal was supported lies in its rejection of social Darwinism and extreme individualism and its acceptance of an optimistic and progressive ideal. Of course, the ideal, both in presidential rhetoric and opinion polls, is tied closely to the importance of work for the able-bodied. Work was glorified by all the presidents as the primary means through which equal opportunity is to be realized. Each president also seemed to recognize that the nation was falling short of its ideal, although each provided a different mix of reasons for this failure, with the welfare system most commonly identified as a critical barrier.

Help vs. Hinder: The War on Welfare

The help versus hinder paradox focuses on the difficulty of designing programs that provide assistance to targeted groups while avoiding unintended consequences that may either cause harm to them or attract others that do not need the programs. A key point derived from how these presidents discussed the impact of anti-poverty programs is that beginning with the later years of the Johnson administration and continuing all the way until the 1996 changes, the presidents in this study focused overwhelmingly on welfare’s negative impacts, rarely discussing any positives, much less actually discussing poverty on its

own (Table 1). In addition, their critiques focused almost exclusively on more conservative attacks on welfare, including a number of claims that were presented matter-of-factly despite being considered controversial in the scholarly literature. The presidents thus helped to reinforce negative public beliefs—many would say misconceptions—about welfare programs that were not clearly supported by research.

Table 1: Importance of Major Anti-welfare Arguments by President

<i>President</i>	<i>Anti-work</i>	<i>Anti-family</i>	<i>Dependency</i>	<i>Waste/Fraud/Abuse</i>	<i>Excessive Cost</i>
Johnson	Low	None	Low	Low	None
Nixon	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Carter	Moderate	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate
Reagan ^a	Moderate	High	High	High	High
Clinton	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate ^b	None	Low

^a Reagan focused on the waste, fraud, and abuse of all government programs from 1980 to 1986, and then focused on more on the welfare system's impact on dependency and family from 1986 to 1988.
^b Clinton did not tend to speak of "dependency," but nonetheless did rely quite heavily on the "trap" metaphor when criticizing welfare.

Whereas the presidents were almost exclusively negative when discussing the welfare system as it operated at the time, they did admit to the potential for positive impacts—or perhaps at least a reduction in their negative impacts—if it was altered according to their designs. Most of the new proposals offered by the presidents involved a redefinition of the purpose of welfare from income maintenance and sustenance to rehabilitation in terms of moving welfare recipients into work. Indeed, the framing of the purpose of rhetoric is clearly a key issue of analysis, not only because almost every president sought to redefine its purpose, but also because the presidents tended to misrepresent welfare's original purpose. Such misrepresentations likely contributed to welfare's unpopularity, as the programs were often condemned for not accomplishing goals they were not designed to address.

Lyndon Johnson somewhat represents the exception to the rule, but not to the extent many may assume. Johnson was certainly optimistic concerning the positive potential of government programs early in his administration, but, like the others, he tended to limit his optimism to his own new Great Society programs. In addition, he offered some of the same criticisms of the welfare system that his successors would make throughout the next thirty years. In introducing his proposals, he often dissociated them from the "dole," identifying the dole negatively as handouts, exploitation, an opiate, and a waste. He even promised that his Great Society would result in the "end of the dole." In 1967 and 1968, he attacked welfare due to its link to dependency, and how it penalized work. Overall, Johnson's War on Poverty

clearly was meant to represent a departure from the traditional welfare system. Johnson differed from the other presidents not in his criticism of welfare, but rather in his broader problem definition and the target audience for his policies. Whereas Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton focused on the welfare population, Johnson focused on the poor overall, which represent a much greater number than those on welfare. Poverty, not the welfare system, was the primary issue for Johnson. The welfare system was still deemed problematic, it was simply not the point of focus. The irony of the War on Poverty was that while Johnson attacked the dole and designed his programs to be distinct from welfare, one of the primary results of his programs was an extraordinary increase in the welfare rolls. That increase and the costs associated with it helped raise welfare reform's position on the public agenda.

Richard Nixon wasted no time in setting his sites firmly on the growing welfare system. Nixon gave the only nationally televised address ever solely focused on the welfare system on August 8th of his first year in the White House.² In that speech alone he called the welfare system a “colossal failure,” a “quagmire,” a “huge monster,” and an “antiquated, wheezing, overloaded machine.” Of the five presidents examined, Nixon was clearly the most rhetorically hostile to the welfare system. His attack focused on its counterproductive tendencies toward work and family, but also included how welfare caused dependency, demeaned the poor, and suffered from waste and abuse. Nixon was troubled about welfare's growing costs and its impact on the economy. He even blamed the violence of the race riots on the false hope provided by Johnson's promises and programs to the disadvantaged. Welfare, he argued, supported a “welfare ethic” that was un-American and “breeds weak people.”³ Nixon sought to replace welfare with his Family Assistance Plan, which, due to its family income floor, work incentives, and simplified administration, would presumably avoid many of welfare's fatal flaws. Thus while he strongly attacked the welfare system, he still supported significant government action. Like Johnson, Nixon also understood that replacing welfare with a program that supported the transition to work would be more expensive than the current system.

Even though he was a Democrat, Jimmy Carter continued the barrage on welfare. His attack was not as wide-ranging as Nixon's and his anti-welfare rhetoric was not nearly as frequent, but nonetheless he was certainly more focused on welfare's flaws than any of its positive impacts or poverty in general. Carter relied on welfare as a campaign issue in 1976, and like Nixon, offered his own major plan to completely “overhaul” the current system. Carter's attack on welfare was three-pronged, addressing welfare's anti-work, anti-family, and inefficient nature. Interestingly, Carter's criticism focused on welfare's mismatch with the able-bodied, which he identified as only ten percent of its clientele. Carter accepted that welfare did indeed work as intended for those that could not work. He offered to replace welfare with the Program for Better Jobs and Income, which split its recipients into those two groups, offering dignity and compassion to unemployables, and better opportunities through work incentives, income supports, and public jobs for those that could not work. After first promising that his plan would

not require additional funds, Carter fell in line with Johnson and Nixon after realizing that changing the nature of welfare for the able-bodied would inherently cost more.

A significant aspect of Ronald Reagan's ideology and persona was tied up in his belief that government caused more harm than good. To Reagan, government was the problem, and the cause of a myriad of economic and social ills. From the beginning of his first presidential campaign, Reagan strongly attacked the wasteful and counterproductive nature of government programs as a whole. Reagan did not, however, significantly discuss welfare's particular ills during his first six years, in part because of the strategy he used to defend his cuts. Reagan primarily focused on how the programs were not needed by many of their recipients, rather than arguing that they were ill-fitted to the able-bodied, as Johnson, Nixon, and Carter had argued. Changing welfare to serve the able-bodied, as those three presidents realized, would cost more, a path Reagan certainly sought to avoid. Starting with the 1986 State of the Union, however, Reagan shifted and began to focus more specifically on welfare's perverse incentives, especially its link to dependency and its negative impact on families. Reagan would eventually sign the Family Support Act of 1988, which did further the connection between welfare and work, but in retrospect was poorly funded and hardly worked to realign welfare toward self-sufficiency.⁴ In the end, Reagan's rhetoric was consistent with his predecessors in terms of focusing primarily on the negative aspects of government programs in general and the welfare system in particular.

Bill Clinton added to the assault on welfare, and made his promise to "end welfare as we know it" a key plank in his 1992 campaign. Considering he was a Democrat and often boasted of his expertise in this policy area from his days as governor and on welfare reform committees, Clinton's critique must be considered especially powerful. Clinton placed substantial blame on welfare for the problems of the poor, calling welfare one of the worst failures of government. His specific criticisms departed somewhat from the other presidents, but the overall impact was similar: welfare did not work, undermined American values, was often counterproductive toward work and family, and was supported by no one. Perhaps Clinton's most relevant critique was that welfare was outdated. Clinton explained, for example, how welfare was originally intended to serve only those that could not work or were expected to stay home to care for their children, and had no other form of support. Clinton relied on Daniel Patrick Moynihan's representative anecdote concerning the "West Virginia miner's widow" on a few occasions to illustrate his point. Welfare had been "set up for the right reasons," but in a nation with millions of single working parents, it was no longer ideally suited to its purpose.

Clinton's plan to fix welfare involved adding some work and behavioral requirements as well as increased spending in a number of other areas, including child care, job training, EITC, and either public employment or subsidies to private employers who hire former welfare recipients. Said differently using Clinton's preferred terminology, in order to work properly, anti-poverty programs needed to provide a much better balance between expecting responsibility and providing opportunity. Work, he argued, must

pay. Within his new proposals, therefore, Clinton certainly assumed an important and useful role for the government, albeit balanced with expectations from the beneficiaries of the programs. Once again, it was clear that properly redefining welfare toward self-sufficiency would come with a significant price tag.

All five presidents were thus rather consistent in their criticism of the welfare system and all hoped either to shift focus to other programs better suited to serve the able-bodied poor, or significantly alter the welfare system in order to better address the current situation. Through the lens of the help-hinder paradox, the presidents clearly focused on the hinder side of things when it came to the welfare system, but were nonetheless rather optimistic about the consequences of these government programs if only certain reforms were made. In other words, welfare specifically was the problem, not government. Whereas Reagan did attack government in general rather harshly from 1980 to 1986, he nonetheless continued to accept the ideal that government had a role in assuring equal opportunity, and from 1986 to 1988, he supported various welfare reform proposals that included a significant role for government, although Reagan tended to prefer that inclusion occur at lower levels of government.

Compared to the scholarly research on poverty, the overall image of welfare presented by the five presidents was problematic. Overall, it was skewed in three ways: many of the specific negative attacks concerning perverse incentives were overstated, the depiction focused predominately on the conservative critiques while being silent on the liberal critiques, and the depiction generally was very limited in terms of outlining any positive impacts.

Examining the first point, a copious amount of research exists examining the consequences of welfare, with numerous contradictory findings. In general, however, it is clear that many of the cause and effect arguments the presidents were making as if they were fact were actually rather unclear. Four of the primary attacks on welfare that were consistently applied from the end of the Johnson administration until the signing of the 1996 bill accused it of being anti-work, anti-family, causing dependency, and excessively costly. While offering limited support for each, the research does not clearly substantiate these four charges.

While the welfare system could certainly act as a disincentive to work, the degree it actually influenced individual decisions to work or not is unclear. In her summary of research in this area, economist Rebecca Blank argued that while cash transfers did lead to less work, the effect was not large.⁵ Without welfare more people would work, but the amount of additional work would not be substantial. In addition, placing all the blame for the decision to choose welfare over work on the welfare system greatly simplifies a complicated situation. Additional factors beyond the cash payment may include the lack of education or skills, child care, transportation, and/or viable jobs. Other than Clinton, the presidents tended to explain simply that welfare created a perverse incentive to remain idle because it was more attractive than work. While welfare was perhaps more attractive than work, such a judgment is relative and thus should consider the pros and cons of both variables. The presidents tended to focus only upon welfare's

negatives and work's positives, and remained silent concerning welfare's positives and work's negatives. As a result, the gap in value between the two seemed drastic.

Whereas welfare's anti-work tendency was perhaps merely overstated and oversimplified, the assumption that the welfare system significantly harmed families, a key criticism for all the presidents after Johnson, is more controversial. Welfare was continuously blamed for encouraging the breakup of marriages or discouraging their onset, as well as encouraging additional out-of-wedlock births. The charges made some logical sense, as the presidents often explained, since the rules of eligibility often required recipients to not have viable wage-earners in the household, and additional children resulted in higher stipends. The research, however, is inconclusive concerning these cause and effect relationships. The assumption that women have children in order to increase their welfare check is especially questionable. For one thing, the increase in funds is low, considering the cost of an additional child.⁶ As explained by one welfare director in 1993: "[a]nyone who thinks that a woman goes through nine months of pregnancy, the pain of childbirth and 19 years of rearing a child for \$45 more a month . . . has got to be a man."⁷

Statistics clearly show that out-of-wedlock births greatly increased during the 1970s and 1980s before leveling off somewhat in the 1990s, but that trend was also true for the general population, not just welfare recipients. In addition, the average size of AFDC families actually decreased from 4 in 1969 to 2.9 in 1990.⁸ Research also shows that fertility rates do not correlate with differences in the levels of stipends from state to state or during different time periods.⁹ In an extensive review of the literature in this area published in the *Journal of Economic Literature*, Robert Moffit concluded that "the most notable characteristic of this literature" was the "failure to find strong benefit effects."¹⁰

The charge that welfare was a trap that caused dependency is also not clearly supported by the literature. Moffit's review did conclude that the level of benefits is "negatively and significantly related to the probability of leaving AFDC, positively and significantly related to the probability of entry onto the AFDC rolls,"¹¹ but, once again, the impact of these correlations is unclear. In general, the research shows that while there is some long term receipt, in most cases welfare spells are temporary. David Ellwood, who would later serve in the Clinton administration, showed that half of the spells on welfare lasted no more than two years, and only ten percent lasted longer than a decade.¹² Rebecca Blank's review concluded that there was little evidence that welfare was "addictive."¹³ Blank explained that the small percentage of long-term recipients often had characteristics that served as major barriers to self-sufficiency. Welfare, in other words, was not the sole or even the primary cause of their dependence. The research also questions the concern over welfare's intergenerational transmission. Research shows that only a quarter or a third of daughters of welfare mothers also end up on the rolls themselves.¹⁴

Welfare's link to dependency has been a particular target of liberal critics. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon argue that "dependency" is the "single most crucial term in the current U.S. debate about

welfare reform” and a key part of the ideological attack against the poor. They described it as a term that “leaks a profusion of stigmatizing connotations—racial, sexual, misogynist, and more.”¹⁵ In 1993, Lucie B. White attacked the link, writing:

The myth is that welfare itself is the problem at the root of entrenched “intergenerational” poverty. According to the myth, it is welfare policy—rather than the more complex historical, structural, economic, and psycho-cultural dynamics of poverty—that causes families, especially those headed by women, to be and to remain poor.¹⁶

Beyond the specific question of whether welfare receipt is correlated with dependency, welfare was essentially designed with the assumption that its recipients would be dependent, so the charge is somewhat misplaced in the first place.

Lastly, Nixon, Carter, and Reagan all attacked welfare’s cost. Examining such a charge is difficult because it is often unclear what programs are included when “welfare” is discussed. Most often welfare presumably refers to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), which became Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) with the 1996 changes. But some may use welfare as a generic term for a number of other means-tested programs, including food stamps, housing assistance, and supplemental security insurance. If only AFDC/TANF is at issue, however, the overwhelming concern on the cost is a bit puzzling, especially when compared to the cost of other large budget items. Comparing federal outlays, unemployment insurance and social security has been more expensive than AFDC every year since 1961. Outlays for AFDC were passed by Medicaid and housing assistance in 1974, food stamps in 1979, SSI in 1991, and EITC in 1996.¹⁷ The cost of welfare certainly increased at a high rate from the 1960s through the 1980s, but it still never became a significant percentage of the overall budget, and the rate of increase was similar to other programs. Writing in 1990, admittedly before the expansion of AFDC in the early nineties but nonetheless insightful, Theodore Marmor, Jerry Mashaw, and Philip Harvey showed that federal AFDC spending as a percentage of total federal spending actually decreased with time, moving from a high of 5.7 percent in 1972 to 1.7 percent in 1987. As a percentage of total federal spending on social welfare programs, AFDC dropped from 12.4 percent in 1972 to 3.6 percent in 1987.¹⁸ In 1987, AFDC represented less than two-fifths of one percent of GNP.

This over-emphasis on welfare’s cost is typical not just of presidential rhetoric, but of public rhetoric about welfare in general. It seems clear that since welfare was unpopular, it became a common target in tax revolts and other criticisms of the increasing cost of government, while more expensive but more popularly supported programs were spared. As a result, public opinion polls consistently reveal that the American public greatly overestimates the cost of welfare.¹⁹

In sum, four of the five major attacks on welfare have some support in the research literature, but overall that support is limited and inconsistent. Even the fifth charge, concerning waste, fraud, and abuse,

can be questioned.²⁰ Perhaps the best way to explain the misrepresentation is to assume that the nation's poor may certainly face a situation that is difficult to escape and that runs counter to work and family, but the presidents clearly placed too much blame on the welfare system for these problems. The welfare system represented only one aspect of the situation, and likely not the most important.

The second issue with the president's depiction of welfare concerns its overemphasis on the conservative critiques compared to the relative silence on the typical liberal critiques. Of course, in general those on the left would tend to focus on poverty, inequality, and discrimination rather than welfare, but they do nonetheless have a distinct view of the problems with the welfare system. A main concern for liberals is the continuing negative stereotypes of welfare recipients, namely that they are lazy, promiscuous, and predominately minorities. While the presidents did not reinforce these stereotypes too strongly, they also never refuted them, despite evidence that the public perception of welfare recipients was distorted.²¹ The attack on welfare from the political left also tends to focus on the inadequacy of benefits and the geographic inequality of benefits. The typical welfare benefit, for example, does not approach bringing the recipient's family to the poverty line. Unlike social security, AFDC was never indexed to the cost of living, therefore the relative value of the benefits continuously decreased with time. Historically, due to the role of states and local communities in setting rates, serious inequalities exist when benefit levels are compared. In high benefit states such as Alaska, California, and Wisconsin, the average payment in 1998 neared or exceeded \$500 a month, while in low benefit states such as Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas, it was often below \$200.²² These gaps far exceed any sense of a cost of living adjustment. Overall, the presidents rarely mentioned these criticisms of welfare. Clinton at times discussed the decreasing value of the welfare stipend, but did not do so within the framework of a critique. Nixon's FAP and Carter's PBJI would have decreased these geographic inequalities, but neither president spent much rhetorical energy in highlighting the problem.

Lastly, the presidents were also mostly silent concerning any positives derived from the welfare program. They did at times admit that welfare did help those who could not work, but their rhetoric overall distracted from such notions. Rebecca Blank outlined three overall lessons she learned from her extensive economic analysis of welfare and poverty issues. The third of these lessons was:

“Nothing works” seriously misinterprets history and ignores the real successes we have achieved. It also ignores thirty years of knowledge about what works and what does not, accumulated through observation, experience, and program evaluation. . . . many of these programs are doing exactly what they were designed to do.”²³

In his book *Poor Support*, Ellwood summarized his years of work on the issue, writing, “somewhat to our surprise, welfare did not seem to deserve much blame for these phenomena [poverty, family disintegration]. Indeed, the research suggested that welfare had done a lot to protect families and children, and the unintended negative effects were quite modest. Welfare seemed to do far more good than harm. . .

. But the message didn't sell very well. People hated welfare no matter what the evidence."²⁴ Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey echoed a similar sentiment in their *America's Misunderstood Welfare State: Persistent Myths, Enduring Realities*, arguing that the nation's social welfare efforts were "taking a bum rap....however successful in practice, are now particularly portrayed as failures, almost never as sources of pride."²⁵ Blank adds that the positive impact of these programs are often underestimated because of a focus on the number of individuals that are brought out of poverty. Such a view of the impacts is very limited, because the modest benefits received by welfare recipients rarely push them over that specific threshold. However, all recipients receive an increase in income that can significantly close the poverty gap and increase their standard of living. Welfare also allows welfare mothers to stay home with their children, an obvious point that is rarely mentioned as well. Commenting on the overall public and scholarly discussion of welfare, Blank concluded by stating: "The claim that these programs have failed is not based on the evidence. We have talked far too much (and often incorrectly) about the failure of antipoverty programs and not enough about their real successes."²⁶ This analysis of presidential rhetoric reveals that for the most part the American presidents have contributed to these misconceptions.

In summary, the presidential discussion of welfare and poverty from roughly 1967 to 1996 was dominated by a very narrow aspect of the overall issue: the conservative perspective concerning welfare's negative impacts. After Johnson turned his focus to the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, poverty essentially disappeared from presidential rhetoric. As many have commented, the War on Poverty became the War on Welfare. For the most part, the complicated tangle of disadvantages Johnson described as the cycle of poverty did not fade away in reality, but certainly did so in presidential rhetoric. In addition, the presidential rhetoric matched the general public (mis)conceptions. While it would be difficult to argue that there was a direct cause and effect relationship between the president's rhetoric and public opinion in causing this misconceptions, a case could be made that the presidents, considering their access to research and the power of the bully pulpit, missed an opportunity to correct them.²⁷

Viewed through the lens of the help-hinder paradox, the presidents overwhelmingly focused on the potential for government anti-poverty programs to hurt its recipients rather than help them. The presidential critiques, however, focused primarily on how the programs worked at the time. All the presidents were much more optimistic about the potential for government to help, if only the programs were altered in various ways. The key alteration overall was a shift in focus from sustenance to work and opportunity. In the end, therefore, especially after the "end" of welfare in 1996, the extensive, and somewhat distorted, attack on AFDC's flaws became rather moot, and all that was left was the optimism surrounding the new role of government anti-poverty efforts. Said differently, the 1996 law worked to swing the pendulum from favoring the hinder side to favoring the help side of the paradox. For thirty years, welfare had been judged harshly and somewhat unfairly for not doing what it was not designed to do. Now, the actual and assumed goals of the government's anti-poverty efforts would finally match.

Deserving versus Undeserving

The five presidents in this study presented an interesting array of characters when discussing welfare and poverty issues. Although the specific characters and labels each invoked varied, the overall categories were rather consistent. Overall, five character groups are particularly relevant: the welfare poor, the working poor, the unemployables, the unemployed, the hard-core poor, and the poor child (Table 2).

Table 2: Importance of Primary Characters in Presidential Poverty/Welfare Rhetoric

	<i>Welfare recipients</i>	<i>Working Poor</i>	<i>Unemployables</i>	<i>Un-employed</i>	<i>Hard-Core Poor</i>	<i>Children</i>
Johnson		Minor	Moderate	Moderate ^a	Major ^b	
Nixon	Major ^c	Moderate	Moderate			
Carter	Moderate	Minor	Moderate	Minor ^d		
Reagan	Major ^e		Moderate ^f	Moderate		
Clinton	Major	Major			Minor ^g	Moderate

^a frictionally unemployed, ^b hard core unemployed, ^c idle loafers, ^d positive image of recently unemployed heads of household early, unemployed teens late, ^e welfare cheats, welfare dependent, and the rationally not needy, ^f the truly needy, ^g some discussion of “underclass”

Welfare Recipients

First, clearly the most complicated and inconsistent image was that of the welfare mother, which tended to vacillate between highly negative and somewhat sympathetic views. This image was the most common and the most important to consider. Public opinion polls consistently show a generally negative image of welfare recipients, although that negativity has softened since 1996.²⁸ In his 1999 book *Why America Hates Welfare*, Martin Gilens argued the hatred of welfare is primarily rooted in the public’s perception, influenced by consistently negative and stereotypical media portrayals,²⁹ that “most people currently receiving welfare are undeserving.” Gilens identified the “the most important single component” of this belief is the assumption that “most welfare recipients would rather sit home and collect benefits than work hard and support themselves.”³⁰ Thus the perceived lack of commitment to the work ethic among the welfare poor, Gilens concluded, was a key belief fueling the American distaste of welfare programs as well as the split between the support for the “poor” but not “welfare recipients.” Research on welfare recipients, on the other hand, shows many of them do work, and overall do not have a value system very different from the non-poor.³¹

Considering the state of public opinion, the presidents were in a similar position as when they discussed welfare: a significant gap seemed to exist between public opinion and more substantive research. Within this context the presidents provided a wide variety of depictions of welfare recipients. Johnson rarely discussed welfare recipients, Nixon primarily attacked them, and Carter, Reagan, and Clinton all provided mixed depictions. Nixon's depiction of the welfare poor was clearly the most negative, as he directly attacked their work ethic. He often contrasted "welfare loafers" to hard working taxpayers, thereby reinforcing the negative public image of welfare recipients. After Nixon, Reagan was perhaps the most negative toward welfare recipients, although he did not seem nearly as negative as is generally assumed. Reagan did at times discuss welfare cheaters, and on two specific occasions invoked the infamous image of the welfare queen. When discussing his experience with welfare reform in California, he made a number of ambiguous statements about "paper people" and recipients scurrying away once the "lights were turned on." However, in order to defend his argument that many of the welfare poor were "not needy" and diminish attacks on him regarding his "harming" of the poor, Reagan needed to avoid presenting an overly negative image. Of his three depictions of the welfare poor, the welfare cheat was less frequent than the welfare dependent or the rational not needy. In addition, Reagan's main ire was reserved for bureaucrats rather than the poor. Overall, Reagan's rhetorical attack on the poor in particular seemed to be exaggerated in public memory and liberal scholarly treatises. He made negative comments here and there, but such comments were overshadowed by comments placing the blame on the system itself, or defending the recipients in various ways. Ironically, one of the reasons for this misperception of Reagan's rhetoric may lie in the liberal critique of Reagan which sought to paint him as more anti-poor than he was, and thus likely highlighted any negative comments he made. True to expectation, Democratic presidents Carter and Clinton tended to avoid the harsher images of the welfare recipients, but nonetheless did not provide overly strong defenses. Both tended to imply at times that welfare recipients were choosing not to work. Carter, for example, did use the label "cheaters" to refer to welfare recipients, while Clinton often defended poor children by indicting the parent's "mistakes" or "sins."

All four of the presidents after Johnson also tended to provide some positive statements concerning welfare recipients, although not as consistent as the negative statements. From time to time, for example, they all mentioned that many were willing to work if given a chance. The idea that welfare recipients were victims trapped in a bad system was perhaps the most consistent image across the presidents. That image was rather neutral, as it provided an external attribution for continued welfare receipt, but also depicted them as rather powerless and weak. Clinton worked the hardest to rehabilitate the image of the welfare recipient by explaining the difficult situation they faced and the rational reasons behind their stays on welfare. He argued that they indeed did hold the American values of work, family, and responsibility dear, and, like all good Americans, hated welfare. Similar to the three presidents before him, Clinton placed much of the blame on the system, not the recipient.

Similar to the lack of discussion of welfare benefits, however, there was also a surprising lack of discussion concerning welfare mothers in their role as mothers. Examining the images of welfare mothers from the Progressive Era to the 1960s, Robert Asen chronicled how the dominant image moved from being focused on the mother as caregiver during the Progressive Movement to confronting the historical tension between work and family during the 1960s. While the debates struggled with the contradiction in roles, however Asen argued that the Nixon administration “stressed work” and “deprivileged the nurturing qualities of mothers as caregivers.”³² This analysis shows that after Nixon, the trajectory away from motherhood and toward work clearly continued. Clinton at times discussed the goal of having welfare mothers succeed both at home and at work, but never provided any sympathetic accounts of welfare mothers as mothers.

In the end, the image of the welfare recipient did seem to soften from Nixon to Clinton. Similar to the critique of welfare, the presidents seemed pessimistic about the past, but optimistic about the future. The presidents did not strongly challenge the public’s negative preconceptions of welfare recipients, and in some cases may have reinforced it, but for the most part after Nixon the poor were rarely the target of direct criticism. The presidents perhaps implied that welfare recipients had made some questionable choices in terms of family planning or work ethic, but nonetheless they were primarily depicted as having the intent and potential to escape welfare and become self-sufficient with a little help from some combination of carrots and sticks. Here Reagan’s image of the “not truly needy” is particularly relevant. Reagan had shifted away from Nixon’s welfare loafer, and even further from William Graham Sumner’s drunkard in the gutter where he ought to be, and presented a rather optimistic image of the poor. Following the work of Charles Murray, the conservative attack was now focused on the welfare system, not the poor, who were merely acting rationally considering their options or were simply trapped in a bad system. This optimistic image was perhaps too optimistic in the sense that many of the poorest recipients lacked the skills to be self-sufficient, but it nonetheless helped instill confidence in the possibility of alternative programs other than welfare to be successful. Clinton then followed Reagan, pushing the same story that the poor had the requisite work ethic, but only needed a chance to escape the trap and then the support to endure outside of it. Put simply, the problem would be not the people, as long as they are given a real chance.

The 1996 law made a major impact on the future relevance of the “welfare recipients” label. By ending welfare, welfare recipients symbolically became “former welfare recipients,” or, ideally, the working poor. Of course, the new TANF rolls remain populated by individuals receiving benefits and not yet working—still over 2 million families in 2004—but the new rules prohibit more than two consecutive years of receipt or five total years in a lifetime, thereby at minimum it makes welfare recipients a temporary category. The law did allow up to twenty percent of the total number on the rolls to be exempt from those time limits, but those exceptions were not widely known or discussed. As a result, welfare

recipients are now actually perceived as *less* abundant than they actually are, whereas for the past thirty years, they had been perceived as much *more* plentiful than they actually were, considering many of the poor never actually received welfare.

The Working Poor

The second primary depiction was that of the working poor. The working poor were not discussed nearly as frequently as the welfare poor. When discussed, however, they were universally depicted in a positive manner. This positive image matched the public conception of the working poor, which was overwhelmingly viewed as the deserving poor. Public opinion polls support the idea that those who work full time should not be in poverty.³³ The very existence of the working poor has even been labeled as “America’s contradiction.”³⁴ In addition, polls also show that Americans “significantly overestimate federal poverty thresholds.” Whereas the poverty level for a family of four is actually \$17,650, almost seventy percent of respondents to a 2000 poll estimated that such a family would need at least \$35,000 to make ends meet. Another twenty-three percent estimated at least \$25,000, meaning eighty-nine percent of the respondents would consider a significant additional portion of America’s working people as the working poor.³⁵ As a result of this generally “deserving” image of the working poor, the public support programs perceived as helping the working poor rather strongly.

The working poor were minor characters in Johnson’s rhetoric as he focused primarily on the hard-core unemployed. To Nixon, the working poor, which he often labeled the “forgotten man,” was presented as the converse of the idle working poor. Nixon defended his FAP in part because it would be much fairer to the working poor, who had for too long been ignored. Ironically, one of the reasons often cited for the failure of the FAP was the criticism that it would add millions to the welfare rolls. Carter’s plan worked similarly, designed to encourage work in part by supplementing the income of the working poor. Carter also admitted that three-fourths of America’s poor families with children had at least one worker. Such a statistic would likely surprise many people, and should have worked to highlight the gap between Carter’s own goal of a guaranteed job that provided a sufficient living wage to working families. Carter, however, did not press the issue much.

Other than the increase to the EITC in the 1986 Tax Reform Act, the Reagan years were tough on the working poor. The 1981 OBRA worked to cut back a number of reforms that had expanded from welfare recipients to the working poor, such as income disregards. Reagan, however, actually did not use the term “working poor,” though his “rational non-needy” would essentially meet the criteria. Reagan thus framed the working poor not from the perspective of how their labor fell short of pulling them out of poverty, but from the perspective of their acceptance of government programs that, according to Reagan, they did not need. The rational not needy was not a highly negative image; its primary function was to

criticize the workings of the welfare system. Thus while Reagan's policies certainly made life more difficult for the working poor, rhetorically he avoided them more than attacking or praising them. One could argue, therefore, that Reagan was able to cut programs for the working poor in part because he framed them as the welfare poor.

Lastly, Clinton discussed the working poor and working families more than all the other presidents combined, mostly while campaigning for increases to both the EITC and the minimum wage. Clinton's original welfare proposal and his framing of the impact of the 1996 law both relied partly on his goal of "making work pay" in order to reduce reliance on welfare. Again and again he cited the fact that eighteen percent of America's workers remained in poverty, another figure that would likely surprise most Americans. He labeled the working poor "America's heroes" on a number of occasions.

Overall, whereas the presidential depiction of the working poor was consistent with the positive image they enjoyed in public opinion, they were generally not a major focus. With all the attention on the welfare system and its flaws, the working poor were simply not a primary subject of conversation. Reagan avoided the term altogether, and Johnson's focus was clearly elsewhere. The FAP and the PBJI would help the working poor, but both presidents tended to discuss their impact on the welfare poor rather than the working poor. Although Clinton certainly discussed the working poor more than the other presidents, his depiction remained limited. He did not, for example, place a strong focus on the working poor in major addresses, and the references to the working poor tended to decrease when the EITC or minimum wage was not near the top of the political agenda.

The Unemployables

The third primary depiction among the five presidents centered on those individuals who could not be expected to be self-sufficient, traditionally termed the "unemployables." All the presidents consistently supported the idea that government should provide generously for the helpless, especially if their misfortune was beyond their control. This division between the unemployables and the able-bodied echoed back to the days of the New Deal. FDR originally sought to provide sustenance to unemployables, and some form of work to the able-bodied. These original policy positions have remained consistent. Opinions differ, however, concerning who is rightfully in each group. The most difficult and controversial question, indeed perhaps the single most important issue concerning anti-poverty policy, is in which group single mothers with young children should be included. In FDR's day, that was not a question, but starting in the 1960s, the assumption that mothers should not be expected to work became more and more controversial.

Interestingly, each president in this study tended to provide a list of groups that would be considered unemployable and thus morally eligible for aid, and often specifically called for generous

increases in their support. Johnson called for a “compassionate program” for those who cannot “take full part in the competitive race,” and included “the aged, the handicapped, the mentally retarded, the illiterates, the dropouts, the unemployed and their dependent children, the uneducated.”³⁶ Nixon never used the term “unemployables,” but nonetheless spoke often on the need to care for those who “cannot care for themselves.” He was particularly vocal about the need to be generous to these individuals, and even criticized the low level of benefits helping them. His list included “the sick, the disabled, the blind, the needy children and the dependent elderly, the mothers who must care for their children, and cannot work.” Single mothers, therefore, were included. Nixon’s FAP specifically exempted “mothers of preschool children” from the work requirements.³⁷ After the FAP had died, Nixon passed Supplemental Security Insurance to help care for the “aged poor, the blind, and the disabled” that “America has always cared for.”

Carter did not focus as much on unemployables, but nonetheless presented a similar list of those not expected to work under his plan. Carter included “those unable to work due to age, physical disability or the need to care for children six years of age or younger.”³⁸ Thus in 1977, the mothers of young children were still considered unemployable. In 1980, Reagan employed the term “truly needy” to identify unemployables. Despite Reagan’s anxiety concerning government, he too supported the need to take care of the “the poverty stricken, the disabled, the elderly, all those with true need.”³⁹ Reagan did not, however, discuss whether or not women with young children would be considered in true need. Lastly, Clinton rarely discussed unemployables, as he focused on those that could work. In the 1996 bill, states were given the the option to exempt women with children under one, and women with children under six could not be penalized if they could not find adequate child care.

Overall, the presidents tended to maintain FDR’s original distinction between the able-bodied and the unemployables. Regardless of political ideologies, all the presidents supported the role of government in helping those who could not help themselves. Interestingly, the Aid to Dependent Children (later AFDC) was originally created to serve solely unemployables, at that point primarily widows with children. By the Nixon administration, many of the adults on AFDC were either divorced or never married women. They were thus less sympathetic, and, in a new world of working single women, considered capable of work. The creation of the SSI program took away disabled children and their strongly sympathetic image from AFDC, further diluting its unemployable status that had already been lessened by the growth of social insurance programs for the aged such as social security and Medicare. As argued by Michael Katz and Lorrin Thomas, “As one group after another of the worthy poor left public assistance for social insurance, those who remained inherited the degraded mantle of outdoor relief...[and] become the undeserving poor.”⁴⁰ By the time Clinton signed the 1996 welfare bill, the adult recipients of AFDC were simply no longer considered unemployables.

The Unemployed

The unemployed represents another generally sympathetic figure to the non-poor. Three aspects of the image helps their cause. First, they are often seen as in the condition only temporarily. Indeed, words such as “temporarily,” “cyclically,” or “frictionally” are often used to modify “unemployed.” The unemployed are thus not dependent on help, but merely need a stopgap. The second aspect that defined the unemployed is that they are viewed as workers that, often due to factors outside of their control, are between jobs and thus need and deserve some assistance. They are perceived, therefore, as having the proper work ethic. Lastly, the support the unemployed receive is derived from a social insurance program rather than an entitlement program. Similar to social security, the perception is thus that the unemployed paid into the program themselves. Unemployment *insurance*, therefore, is not perceived as an income transfer. As explained by Nixon, unemployment insurance is an “earned benefit. . . . Accordingly, there is no demeaning of human dignity, no feeling of being ‘on the dole,’ when the insured worker receives benefits due.”⁴¹

The public’s sympathetic view of the unemployed is clear in the literature. Martin Gilens’ work actually shows that the public’s sympathy for the poor increases as the unemployment rate increase.⁴² Said differently, when the public assumes a greater percentage of those suffering from poverty are in that situation due to unemployment, they are more sympathetic to the poor as a whole. When unemployment is high, significant pressure is placed on the government to act, further evidence that unemployment is perceived as an external attribution. It is clear, for example, that the New Deal was at least in part a political possibility because of the unprecedented level of unemployment. It was exceedingly difficult at the time to blame individuals for their poverty when half the nation was out of work. Since the New Deal, unemployment insurance has generally remained a popular program. In times of high unemployment, Congress has often extended the time period for the receipt of unemployment benefits, usually without much political controversy.

Due in part to their perceived temporary status, the unemployed were not a major figure in the rhetoric of the five presidents. Like the unemployables, the presidents would at times mention the unemployed, dissociating them from the long-term poor or welfare poor, and simply reaffirming the need to support them. In general, beyond extending benefits as necessary during troubling economic times, the presidents seem to be satisfied with the workings of the unemployment system. Johnson’s War on Poverty did not call for any major changes in the unemployment system. Nixon rarely even mentioned the unemployed. In the 1976 campaign and early in his time in office, Carter did discuss in some detail a very sympathetic image of recently unemployed heads of household and the difficulties they faced. Carter utilized the image to attack Ford, who was the incumbent during a time of high unemployment. Carter did not, however, clearly identify a policy to address that problem. By the time Carter began to focus on PBJI,

he no longer relied on that particular depiction. Toward the end of his presidency, Carter placed some focus on the image of the unemployed youth. Unfortunately for Carter, that image likely did not share the same sympathy as the unemployed in general, especially considering Carter sought to focus on minority unemployed youth. Carter's call for new programs to help them eventually fell silent.

Reagan was perhaps the most sympathetic to the unemployed. Reagan supported many of the assumptions about the unemployed. He expressed, for example, an environmental attribution for their predicament and confirmed their desire to work. He explained that he personally "ached" for the suffering, and built identification with them by referring to his family's experience with unemployment during the Great Depression. Reagan did not, however, push policies to help the unemployed despite high levels of unemployment. Reagan's sympathy for the unemployed was perhaps necessary then to counteract his inaction.

Lastly, Clinton actually did call for reform to the unemployment system. Clearly influenced by the work of his Secretary of Labor at the time, Robert Reich, Clinton sought to redirect the focus of the unemployment system from temporary income maintenance to "re-employment." The proposal in many ways mirrored Clinton's plans for welfare reform. Citing the changes in the nature of modern work, especially the decline in manufacturing jobs and the impact of globalization and technology, he believed the unemployed would have to be retrained in new areas of work. Throughout the end of 1994 and the beginning of 1995, Clinton discussed the topic often, but beyond holding a Conference on Reemployment in February of 1995, nothing significant was ever accomplished in this area. In summary, the deserving image of the unemployed remained generally stable and uncontroversial through this time period.

The Hard Core Poor

The final two characters relevant to this discussion, the hard core poor and poor children, were absent from most of the presidents' rhetoric. Johnson's most important character was what he labeled the "hard core unemployed," which he dissociated from the "frictionally unemployed" due to the former's long term status. Johnson depicted the hard core unemployed with a very clear external attribution. They were characterized by never having had a chance at life, and being mired in a cycle of poverty that included the lack of jobs, bad housing, poor schools, lack of skills, discrimination, and ultimately hopelessness. Due to the particularly difficult situation from which these poor suffered, economic growth, the typical American anecdote to poverty, was not considered sufficient, hence the need for Johnson's new War on Poverty programs.

Johnson's hard core unemployed became the "underclass" of the 1980s and 1990s. The term underclass was introduced to most Americans in a 1977 *Time* magazine article, and was described there as "a large group of people who are more intractable, more socially alien and more hostile than almost

anyone had imagined. They are the unreachable: the American underclass. . . . made up mostly of impoverished urban blacks, who still suffer from the heritage of slavery and discrimination.”⁴³ Much like Johnson’s hard-core unemployed, the underclass were perceived as having lost hope, thereby rejecting the middle-class values of work and family. Underclass poverty was thus different than other kinds of poverty. As a result, the underclass was firmly and almost exclusively within the realm of the undeserving poor. Whereas Johnson focused on the environmental factors that caused the hard core unemployed to lose hope, the underclass label focused much more on individual attitudes and behaviors, especially those behaviors that defied social norms, and disregarded the environmental factors that may have led to those attitudes and behaviors.⁴⁴ Writing in 1992, Christopher Jenks argued that the negative label of the underclass was dominating the discussion of poverty, and thus “instead of blaming poverty on society, as we did in the late 1960s, we are now more inclined to blame poverty on the poor.”⁴⁵ The image of the underclass was certainly detrimental to support for anti-poverty programs, as they clearly heightened the sense that the millions that were being spent were being wasted on the undeserving.

The image of the underclass had a very strong racial component, and was primarily identified geographically with America’s inner-cities. Both of these perceptions would have clearly disappointed Johnson, who worked hard to counteract the assumptions that his hard core unemployed were predominately African American and urban. These perceptions work to make the underclass seem more foreign (and dangerous) to the non-poor, thus reducing the possibility of identification and sympathy. In the public mind, there is also some overlap between the underclass and the welfare poor—one assumed characteristic of the underclass is long-term welfare receipt—and the degree of that overlap would clearly influence the degree of support, or lack thereof, for helping the welfare poor.

Interestingly, despite its important place in both the scholarly literature and the media, the term underclass was almost entirely absent from presidential rhetoric. Its use began in 1977, but Carter and Reagan each only used the term exactly once.⁴⁶ Clinton, whose “favorite sociologist” was William J. Wilson, who wrote often about the underclass, did use the term more frequently.⁴⁷ One of Clinton’s many catch phrases called for policies that would “expand the middle class and shrink the underclass.” He associated these two goals with raising the minimum wage, increasing EITC, and reforming welfare. He would only briefly mention the underclass beyond that catch phrase, however. The most detailed he ever was concerning them was when he defined them as “the people who are permanently trapped in poverty, the children living in the big cities.”⁴⁸ Clinton, therefore, did not address the complicated tangle of pathologies typically discussed in the underclass literature. For him, “making work pay” would be enough to end the permanence of the underclass condition.

The Child in Poverty

The final primary depiction, that of the poor child, was mostly absent from the rhetoric of these presidents. Only Clinton discussed children in this context, and his depiction was rather limited. The image of the poor child is inherently sympathetic, and Clinton especially relied on that trait when criticizing Republican welfare proposals in 1995 and 1996. But Clinton did not develop the depiction of the poor child in much detail, and in some ways utilized its innocence to heighten the lack of innocence of their parents in comparison. At times children would make brief appearances in stories told by Johnson and Carter concerning the hard core unemployed or the recently unemployed head of household, respectively, but the focus again was typically not on the child, but rather the parent. Such stories worked in the opposite manner of Clinton's, as they attempted to develop sympathy for the parents by highlighting their inability to care properly for their children due to circumstances beyond their control.

Overall, however, it is clear that the presidents tended to avoid relying on the image of children when discussing welfare or poverty, despite the high percentage of children in poverty and on the welfare rolls. Indeed, children represent more than two thirds of the welfare case load.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the depictions of welfare recipients consistently gave the impression that they were predominately adult and able to work.

While the specific image of the child was rather rare, the use of "family" indirectly appealed to the same core beliefs concerning the innocence of children. When invoking their version of the ideal of equal opportunity, for example, both Carter and Clinton specified that "families with children" and a full-time worker should not be in poverty. Many of the policies that have improved the income of the working poor only apply to families with children, and significantly increases depending on how many children are in the household. Writing in 1993, Peter Edelman, who served in the Clinton White House and resigned after Clinton signed the bill, considered the poverty rate among children and questioned the assumption that the public would naturally perceive children as deserving. Capturing an important truth about poverty politics, he wrote that "whatever our rhetoric, what we actually do for particular children depends upon what we think of their parents."⁵⁰ In the end, one must question the inherently deserving image of the child and the clear hesitance of relying upon it. Currently children only enter the discussion when it concerns the issue of child care. Increasing child care subsidies was one area that Clinton held somewhat firm in his call for providing opportunity in welfare reform during his retreat from 1994 to 1996, and it continues today as one of the policy areas that Democrats are pushing for additional funds in discussions concerning the reauthorization of the 1996 law.

The Deserving – Undeserving from 1963-1996

Perhaps the primary lesson derived from the characters discussed by Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton from 1963 to 1996 is that FDR's New Deal dissociation between unemployables and the able-bodied has endured and resurfaced. The only significant change has been the move of single mothers from the former to the latter. Working with that distinction, the presidents were consistently sympathetic to the working poor, the unemployed, the unemployable, and poor children. The first two represented the able-bodied that were either working or had been working until circumstances out of their control prevented them from continuing. The latter two represented unemployables that deserved generosity. While these four were all depicted in a positive manner, they were rarely the focus of discussion for long, either in presidential rhetoric or in the public conversation in general.

Predominately missing from the presidential rhetoric since Johnson was a sophisticated image of the poor that outlined numerous and varied individual and environmental barriers they faced. To his credit, Johnson did not shy away from attempting to educate the American people on the cycle of poverty, although his overly optimistic rhetoric envisioning the end of poverty likely distracted from that message. As argued by Robert Asen, however, after Johnson the public vision of the poor narrowed considerably. Rather than discussing poverty as "a multifarious phenomenon affecting diverse types of people," most Americans began to focus primarily on one aspect of poverty: dependency on welfare.⁵¹

The primary image of poverty throughout these years was thus the welfare recipient. That very fact does not bode well for the poor, as their public image was consistently negative. The presidential image of the welfare recipient never strongly challenged this negative image, but only Nixon's rhetoric closely mirrored it. Perceptions concerning Reagan's attack on the poor seemed somewhat exaggerated, as his primary point concerning the welfare poor was that they did not need help, not that they did not deserve help. In addition, the inherent optimism in Reagan's depiction worked against the pessimism of the culture of poverty thesis and the dominant assumptions of the underclass. The welfare poor were not hopeless. Clinton then built on Reagan's optimism by presenting the welfare mother as ready and willing to work. These positive images of the potential of the welfare recipient are critical to the public support of expensive policies to help them move from welfare to work.

These positive images also facilitated the final shifting of the welfare mother from the ranks of the unemployables to the able-bodied poor. As Clinton explained in his address at the signing ceremony, the 1996 welfare law transformed the welfare poor into the working poor, and essentially did away with the former category altogether. Viewed in light of the past thirty years of welfare rhetoric, this transformation is revolutionary. The primary image of poverty since the presidency of Richard Nixon suddenly did not exist. In the years since 1996, it seems clear that the image of the working poor has filled that void, a phenomenon that certainly bodes well for the poor. Similar to the switch in the dominant

perception of the hinder-help paradox from the former to the latter, the dominant assumptions concerning the poor switched from the undeserving side to the deserving side of this paradox. Indeed, all the remaining categories—the working poor, the unemployed, the unemployables, and children—are all considered the deserving poor. Whether or not that switch is maintained will play a significant role in future deliberations concerning anti-poverty policy.

A final important note concerning the depiction of the poor is the lack of discussion concerning the connection between poverty, welfare, and race. Johnson actively tried to keep his War on Poverty from being perceived as targeted toward African Americans, knowing such a perception would harm it politically. After Johnson, however, the presidents rarely addressed race in the context of poverty and welfare. Such an absence is notable because while minorities are statistically overrepresented in the poverty ranks when compared to their proportion in the population overall, that overrepresentation is itself then strongly overestimated by the public, who tend to perceive poverty and especially welfare as predominately minority issues. As Gilens has shown, the racial coding of welfare and welfare recipients is a significant cause for their unpopularity.⁵² The presidential reticence on this issue, therefore, can be interpreted two ways. If the presidents did focus on race while discussing welfare, they would have likely reinforced the misconception. On the other hand, by ignoring the mistaken belief, they allowed it to continue.

Policy versus Politics: The Transformation

All five presidents in this study placed welfare or poverty high on their political agendas and attempted to alter significantly the manner in which the nation addresses these problems. The difficulties faced by each certainly lend support to the notion that the policy-politics dilemma is particularly acute for these issues. Johnson took advantage of a unique political and economic situation that briefly turned the tables and actually made attacking poverty a positive political issue, but that window closed abruptly in the late 1960s, and in the end Johnson's War on Poverty has practically become a foil for anti-government forces to point to as the ultimate failure of government. Nixon and Carter both presented policies that would have redefined the welfare system, but despite their moderate designs that appealed to both the liberal and conservative assumptions, neither could overcome the political barriers to make them law. Reagan perhaps was the most successful in achieving some of his policy goals early in his time in office, again taking advantage of an ideal political situation, but by the time he left, the trajectory of public spending that he initially slowed had returned in force. Clinton did fulfill his campaign promise to end welfare as we knew it, but only after retreating significantly from his original proposal. Overall, stories of political failures clearly dominated any sense of successes.

During this so-called “retrenchment era” in social policy, most commentators would agree, and opinion polls would support, that the conservative assumptions concerning poverty and welfare grew in importance and popularity from the late 1960s into the 1990s.⁵³ Those beliefs—including fears of moral decline, broader acceptance of free market ideology, the increasing rejection of the politics of identity and entitlement, and, above all, a general anti-government disposition and a corresponding pessimism concerning the consequences of any government action—certainly made the negotiation of the politics-policy dilemma more difficult for Democrats than Republicans concerning poverty. These beliefs often crystallized in the negative public image of welfare recipients and welfare itself. For much of the time period examined in this study, welfare was considered much more of a social problem than poverty, a telling phenomenon considering that welfare was originally designed as a treatment for poverty. This change in ideology, the conservative revolution, is therefore blamed by many on the left for the harsh treatment of the poor and the acceptance of expanding inequalities.

Despite the growing prevalence of these beliefs and the cynicism of the 1980s and 1990s, the traditional American ideal of equal opportunity and its corresponding sympathy for the poor has persisted. The politics-policy dilemma works both ways in American politics. It makes it difficult to take from the non-poor to help the poor, especially if both the poor and the government are perceived negatively, as they both were during much of this time period. On the other hand, it also punishes politicians for harming the deserving poor. Consider, for example, the amount of rhetorical energy Reagan had to expend defending himself and his policy cuts.

Consider, for example, that all five presidents regardless of their political ideology expressed the same ideal: equal opportunity. The differences among Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Clinton all therefore resided at a lower level. This overarching ideal of equal opportunity, often invoked as the American dream, remains a powerful and progressive force in national politics. The conservative revolution did not reject this ideal, in actuality by rejecting the inherent pessimism of traditional conservatism, it actually strengthened it. In the end, a critical question emerges. *If the ideal of equal opportunity is universal, and the gap between that ideal and the real is rather obvious, how is the gap justified?* Said differently, how do the American people in general, and their presidents in particular, manage the inconsistency between this ideal and their behavior of allowing inequality to continue.

Particularly relevant to this question is the theory of cognitive dissonance developed originally by Leon Festinger in 1957, considered the “most widely investigated social psychological theory of its era.”⁵⁴ Cognitive dissonance addresses those situations in which an individual’s beliefs and behaviors are inconsistent. The three basic assumptions of Cognitive Dissonance theory are that (a) people have a need for cognitive consistency, an assumption that grew out of Fritz Heider’s Balance Theory⁵⁵; (b) when cognitive inconsistency exists, such as when beliefs clash with behaviors, people experience psychological discomfort; and (c) that psychological discomfort motivates people to resolve the inconsistency and

restore cognitive balance. Festinger in turn argued that individuals can resolve their cognitive dissonance by either changing their belief, changing their behavior, or adding new cognitive elements to somehow cope with the imbalance. The first two solutions are rather straightforward, whereas the third opens up a wide range of possibilities. Indeed, the human mind can be very creative when it comes to finding ways to justify imbalances. The inherent egoism evident in human nature identified by many psychologists would also lead one to assume that in general, individuals would seek out coping strategies that make them feel better about themselves while requiring the least amount of effort.⁵⁶

A useful typology to consider the range of possibilities within Festinger's third option was introduced by Robert Abelson. Abelson outlined four primary modes of resolution of "belief dilemmas" that cause "intrapersonal conflict." Abelson's typology would later serve as the foundation for B.L. Ware and Wil Linkugel's rhetorical theory of apologia. Abelson's four modes were: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence. Beyond Abelson's original four, two more relevant: avoidance and projection. These six strategies represent the primary ways in which an individual can attempt to cope with an inconsistency between a belief and a behavior without actually changing one or the other.

Denial and avoidance are rather self-explanatory. Bolstering involves framing, as the individual, using selective exposure to information, focuses primarily on how the behavior is consistent with other beliefs, in order to overshadow the particular belief that it violates. As explained by Abelson, bolstering is a "mechanism for not eliminating the imbalance entirely but for drowning it out, so to speak."⁵⁷ Projection involves shifting the blame to a third party or circumstances outside the individual's control. The behavior, in this sense, was involuntary, therefore the inconsistency is justified. Differentiation uses the process of splitting the behavior into two types, one highly negative and one more subdued, and then dissociating from the negative while admitting to the lesser charge. Differentiation works in part through the persuasive workings of the contrast effect, the human tendency that perception is greatly affected by that to which it is immediately compared. In comparison to the highly negative behavior, the perceived depravity of the secondary behavior is lessened. Like bolstering, differentiation admits to the inconsistency, but limits it through the comparison. Lastly, transcendence is the opposite of differentiation. As explained by Ware and Linkugel, using transcendence individuals "psychologically move the audience away from the particulars of the charge at hand in a direction toward a more abstract, general view."⁵⁸ The importance of the specific inconsistency is lessened due to the comparison of the much broader view.⁵⁹

Cognitive dissonance and the modes of resolution were developed with a focus on individual decisions and inconsistencies, but nonetheless can be applied to broad public beliefs such as the ideal of equal opportunity. Societies are, after all, collections of individuals. The key question stated above asked if the ideal of equal opportunity is universal, and the gap between that ideal and the real is rather obvious, how is the gap justified? Equal opportunity thus represents a public belief, and the behavior is the toleration of the lack of equal opportunity, namely that exhibited by the existence of significant poverty.

As a result, cognitive dissonance should exist in the minds of the American people. Using Festinger's original three ways to address cognitive dissonance, the people can change their belief and reject the ideal of equal opportunity, they can attempt to change the behavior and attack poverty, or they can utilize one or more of the six coping strategies to reduce their discomfort. The ideal of equal opportunity is significantly engrained in the American psyche, and is not likely to be abandoned, therefore the first option can be set aside.

Examining the public discourse of poverty in general and the rhetorical efforts of these five presidents in particular, the use of a number of the coping strategies are evident. Interestingly, Lyndon Johnson, influenced by the work of authors such as Michael Harrington, worked to *increase* the discomfort Americans should feel concerning the existence of poverty. Johnson's hypocrisy appeals directly served to heighten the inconsistency between American ideals and the reality for many of the nation's disadvantaged. Johnson, therefore, hoped to take advantage of the feeling of discomfort he highlighted, avoid the various coping strategies, and push for a change in behavior. Johnson's strategy worked well at first, as America seemed to agree with Johnson's aversion to poverty amongst plenty, and supported his War on Poverty, albeit briefly. From the late 1960s until 1996, however, the discussion of poverty was characterized much more by coping strategies that sought to minimize any feelings of inconsistency. Three in particular stand out: projection, differentiation, and avoidance.

Projection was clearly the most important coping strategy used throughout this time period. The lack of equal opportunity was acknowledged, even advertised, but the blame for that inconsistency was projected directly onto the welfare system. By blaming welfare for poverty, the solution to the inconsistency involved changing welfare, not any other behaviors or systems. Through projection, welfare's impact on the work ethic and family disintegration explained the development of the underclass, and helped distract from any other framings of poverty and inequality. Welfare, not poverty or inequality, caused dependency and violated freedom. Supporting the welfare system thus represented the behavior causing the inconsistency, not accepting poverty. Welfare thus served as the red herring, drawing all the negative attention to itself. This strategy was used by all the presidents, and was the primary claim in Reagan's attack on the welfare state. Again, if government would simply get out of the way, the free market would naturally create equal opportunity, and America's beliefs and behaviors would once again be "in balance."

Whereas projection focused blame on the welfare system, the use of differentiation identified the welfare recipient as the scapegoat. The cognitive element of denying equal opportunity was thus split into two elements, the denial of opportunity to the deserving poor and the denial of opportunity to the undeserving poor, and welfare recipients, in the public mind, were predominately considered undeserving. Individuals could thus admit to the lesser charge while rejecting the other. They implied, in other words, that equal opportunity did exist for the deserving poor, or otherwise managed to avoid that question

altogether. From this perspective, the existence of poverty was blamed on the welfare poor, who squandered their opportunity due to laziness, poor family choices, drug use, or some dispositional attribution. Poverty thus represented unequal results due to unequal effort, and equality of opportunity remained intact. Once again, all the presidents relied on this strategy somewhat, or at least did not strongly attack the public's reliance upon it, and Nixon invoked it the most strongly. He attacked the poor for choosing to "loaf" rather than work, even if the job involved menial labor. Although each president did rely on differentiation to some degree, it was clearly secondary to the projection upon the welfare system. In most cases, the system's set of perverse incentives was blamed more than the individual's morality in making the choice to join or stay on welfare.

Avoidance would involve the degree to which the inconsistency is actually discussed, or how high on the media or political agenda the issues of poverty and inequality reside. Although each of the four presidents after Johnson placed welfare reform high on their agenda, for the most part none of the four significantly discussed poverty itself. Considering the various characters each depicted, the poor were minor characters unless discussed as welfare recipients. The complicated images of poverty present in Johnson's rhetoric did not reappear. The presidents rarely discussed the growing evidence of inequality between the rich and the poor. While all the presidents did support the goal of equal opportunity, and expressed various specific applications of that ideal such as work guarantees and living wages, they rarely put much emphasis on the inconsistency between those ideals and reality.

The remaining three coping strategies were not as evident during this time period, and only transcendence would seem to have much potential. Denial would involve denying that poverty represents the violation of equal opportunity, which would be a difficult case to make without relying on one of the other coping strategies to reframe poverty. Bolstering would involve focusing on the various positives to the lack of equal opportunity that would thereby justify or drown out the negative. Possible arguments here could be that the existence of poverty keeps wages low and creates an incentive structure for the poor to behave properly. The critique of welfare policy from Frances Fox Piven, for example, accuses the political right of such hidden motives. Similar but less controversial are arguments that allow for the existence of some unemployment in order to keep inflation low, but that belief is likely accepted due to the temporary perception of unemployment. Thus while some examples of bolstering can be identified, it does not seem to be a very strong possibility.

Lastly, transcendence would involve moving away from the particulars of American poverty and inequality and focusing on a broader plane. In the age of globalization, such strategies could be rather impactful. Indeed, one of the difficulties for anti-poverty advocates in the United States is to justify the focus on national poverty when in comparison to many of the world's poor, the American poor are rather well off. Alternatively, perhaps combining the strategies of avoidance and transcendence, broader issues often capture the national agenda and relegate poverty to the background. The American people have thus

been distracted from poverty by the various wars and scandals during this time period that have transcended concern over poverty. War in particular works to decrease focus on poverty, as the cognitive split between the poor and the nonpoor is replaced with a focus on the alternative “us” and “them” represented by Americans and their enemy. Concern over inequality, it would seem, also stops at the water’s edge. One must not go to the extreme of various “wag the dog” theories to understand the power of a war to transcend concerns about the relative income increases of the bottom quartile as compared to the top quartile. Indeed, the 1996 law has been up for reauthorization since 2002, but in the aftermath of 9/11, lawmakers have been preoccupied elsewhere, and have repeatedly extended it on a yearly basis.

The relevance of this analysis of the various coping strategies lies in the impact of the 1996 changes on the available strategies. *Simply put, the law rendered the two most important coping strategies of the last thirty years moot. Symbolically, welfare and welfare recipients no longer existed.* As explained by Clinton in his signing day address, the primary image of government anti-poverty efforts was transformed from the despised welfare system which was perceived at best as ineffectual and at worst as counterproductive to a number of other programs which all enjoyed much more popular support. Considerable energy had been expended shifting the blame for poverty upon the welfare system, and with its removal, the inconsistency could no longer be justified in that way. The corresponding glorification of work that continued throughout this time period should only add to the pressure to make work pay. At the same time, again as Clinton explained, welfare recipients were transformed from their enduring undeserving image into the sympathetic image of the working poor. The coping strategy of differentiation was thus eclipsed by the removal of the negative element, and, once again, the inconsistency could no longer be justified in this way. Either new coping strategies would have to be developed, or Americans would have to face the inconsistency. In summary, the potential impact of the 1996 law is to alter the policy direction of the politics-policy dilemma precisely because it shifted the dominant perceptions concerning the deserving-undeserving and help-hinder paradoxes. From the late 1960s until 1996, the barriers precluding helping the poor dominated the discussion. The 1996 law eliminated two of the most important barriers, and now it could be argued that *not* providing significant assistance to the working poor could be politically hazardous.

There is considerable support that the manner in which the nation sees the poor has changed since the passing of the 1996 bill. As David Zarefsky has written, the success of social policy is dependent on “a conducive rhetorical climate . . . of optimism about the feasibility and value of social change.”⁶⁰ Whereas such a climate was plainly not present in 1992, or since the late 1960s for that matter, an argument could be made that such a climate now exists.⁶¹ Such questions are beyond the scope of this analysis, but some preliminary points can be made.

The most obvious effect of the 1996 law was the amazing reduction in the number of welfare recipients. Between January of 1994 and June 1999, the caseloads were cut in half, from 5 million to 2.5

million.⁶² Scholars disagree on the particular impact of each cause, but in general agree that the causes of the decline were threefold: the new welfare rules (many of which had already been in effect before 1996 due to state waivers approved by Clinton), a robust economy that produced millions of jobs, and the “massively increased aid to low-income workers.”⁶³ The third cause should not be underestimated. Simply put, Clinton pursued his promise of “making work pay” vigorously, and the Republican Congress often readily agreed. Clinton had already passed an EITC increase in 1993 and raised the minimum wage in 1996. In 1997, the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 signed by Clinton included the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) which expanded coverage to the working poor. Clinton’s Welfare-to-Work coalition, a group of companies that have promised to work to hire welfare recipients, grew to 20,000 employers strong and hired 1.1 million former recipients at one point.⁶⁴ The Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997, a Republican proposal, provided a \$500 tax credit per child, although by making the credit nonrefundable it helped the near poor and the middle class more than the poor themselves, since the poor rarely owed income tax due to the EITC. Because the state block grants for TANF were set at a rate of spending from 1992-1994, states ended up having significant surpluses in funds due to the plummeting rolls which in many cases were used to develop more welfare to work programs and to help provide more child care funds.

As a result of these programs, the increase in spending for the poor since the 1996 law is astounding. Spending on CHIP, Medicaid, child care, and EITC went from \$11 billion in 1988, to \$32.8 in 1992, to \$66.7 billion in 1999. Child care spending alone increased from \$933 million in 1996 to over \$3.3 billion in 2000. As noted by Blank and Ellwood, “The EITC *increase* alone was nearly as large as the *total* amount the federal government was spending on AFDC when Clinton took office.”⁶⁵ Amazingly, all these improvements were accomplished despite the fact that Clinton’s second term was dominated by scandal, which precluded his focus on these issues.

These increases have continued into the administration of George W. Bush. His rhetoric, at least during the 2000 election and early in his presidency, was more sympathetic to and focused on positive images of the poor than former Republican presidents. During a 2001 commencement speech, for example, Bush noted that 12 million American children still lived in poverty, and declared that “[w]elfare as we knew it has ended, but poverty has not.”⁶⁶ Bush’s own welfare reform proposal has focused more on additional work requirements rather than increased spending to help the working poor, a disappointment to those on the left, but Bush has not pushed hard on those reforms, and for the most part has not criticized the massive increases in spending. Bush has also focused upon faith based initiatives as potential tools to address poverty, a policy that has drawn criticism from many on the left as well. Bush’s tax reform, however, was rather generous to the working poor, as he increased the Child Tax Credit from \$500 to \$1000, increased its refundable status for the working poor, and expanded EITC for married families.⁶⁷

The combination of the welfare changes, strong economy, legislative action, and increased spending has also resulted in a remarkable increase in the overall income of the working poor. These changes also clearly impacted the comparison between receiving welfare and working for minimum wage. In 2000, David Ellwood analyzed the difference between working and not working for a single mother of two in 1986 and 1996, using 1996 dollars. According to Ellwood, in 1986 non-working single parents could receive \$8,459 from AFDC, while single parents working full time would essentially have \$10,464 remaining after paying taxes and child care. In 1996, single nonworking parents could receive \$7,501 in TANF funds, while single parents working full time could take home \$14,630 after taxes and child care support. From 1986 to 1996, therefore, the difference in income between welfare and minimum wage work increased from \$2,005 to \$7,129. In addition, due to the development of CHIP, workers no longer would have to lose health coverage for their children when leaving welfare.⁶⁸ The change in the tax burden of the poor, especially those with children, has also declined dramatically. In 1970, a family with one child was bracketed at a 9 percent rate. In 2002, that rate was *negative* 11.9. The differences increased with each additional child as well.⁶⁹ As a result of these programs, in 1999, child poverty was at its lowest level—19.6 percent, or 14 million children—since the government began measuring it in 1979.⁷⁰ By 2002, it had dropped to 16 percent, or 11 million.

Significant evidence exists that despite rising costs, the public continues to support these programs for the working poor very strongly. In a report from the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank, polls from 2001 were reviewed that showed over *eighty* percent support for a number of policies that benefit the poor, including improving schools in low income areas, expanding job training programs, expanding day care subsidies, increasing the minimum wage, spending more on medical care for the poor and increasing tax credits to the poor.⁷¹ Polls that split the opinion of Republicans and Democrats show that the gap between the two on these issues is rather minor.⁷² Polls also show that there have been significant declines in public frustration with poor people, as well as a “noticeable decline in hostility” toward welfare recipients.⁷³ Of course, perhaps the most important symbolic impact of the 1996 law was the shift in the representative character for these issues from the “undeserving” welfare poor to the “deserving” working poor, which tapped into the historical differentiation between the two in the polling data. This shift also worked to reduce the public’s identification of these issues with minorities, because while welfare and welfare recipients were strongly associated with race, the working poor and the programs that assisted them were not, as Gilens’ research attests.⁷⁴

In addition, the impact of the removal of these welfare and welfare recipients from the discussion, the first two “transformations” outlined in Clinton’s signing day speech, could very well have resulted in the triggering of the remaining two: the transformation of the welfare debate from a mean-spirited political game to a constructive bi-partisan dialogue concerning the best methods to help the former welfare

recipients become self-sufficient, and the transformation of the relationship between the poor and the non-poor from simple maintenance and estrangement to mutual responsibility and identification. By focusing on helping individuals become self-sufficient through work, anti-poverty advocates now have the ear of both political parties. The political incentives for Democrats to paint Republicans as hateful of the poor and for Republicans to identify Democrats as the party of entitlements and welfare queens no longer exist.

The impressive growth of the “Living Wage Movement” may also be a signal of the new relationship between the poor and the non-poor. By 2002, over 100 cities had living wage ordinances and another 100 additional campaigns were active across the nation. In many cases, these campaigns have created strong new coalitions of the working poor, women’s groups, religious organizations, civil rights organizations, and labor unions, and have provided a critical revitalization of the latter.⁷⁵ Robert Asen argued in the conclusion of *Visions of Poverty* that what was needed to help the poor was more inclusive political community. Asen strongly criticized the passing of the 1996 bill, arguing it “signaled a retreat from community, from a national commitment to one another’s well being.”⁷⁶ I would argue, however, that it may very well be that law that ultimately spurs the creation of such of a stronger national community. The devolution of the design for welfare programs to the state level better allows for grass-root movements to make an impact. Whereas before a significant gap existed between the negative stereotype of the welfare poor and the nonpoor, often preventing identification, the present gap is much narrower. Again, sending a federal check to the poor to sustain them for the month requires no community. Providing skills, creating jobs, and making those jobs accessible and adequate will.

In sum, it is obvious that the political climate concerning poverty has changed. As summarized by Blank and Ellwood in their examination of Clinton’s legacy concerning America’s poor:

These changes transformed the political discussion about welfare and the programmatic organization of public assistance. Devolution to the states has given state governors much greater involvement in program design and oversight. The perceived success of work-oriented programs has led to political support for welfare-to-work programs and for welfare reform among a broad spectrum of political leaders. Five years after welfare reform was passed, many people are invested in making it succeed . . . Sharp criticism of welfare mothers—so-called welfare bashing—has receded as well, as more recipients combine work and income. Public support for the current work-oriented programs appears to be relatively strong.⁷⁷

These changes are even evident in the research on poverty. For years, as argued by Alice O’Connor in *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*, poverty research has been dominated by “individual failings rather than structural inequality, of cultural and skill ‘deficits’ rather than the unequal distribution of power and wealth.”⁷⁸ In recent years, however, the research has also turned its focus to what works to encourage self-sufficiency and what problems

remain which still must be addressed. Now conservative scholars have a vested interest in showing how welfare reform can move recipients into sustainable work and are better off without welfare. Many liberal scholars, while at first focused on attacking Clinton for signing the bill and predicting mass hunger, have now begun to recognize, albeit with caution, the positive potential of the new political environment.

Lastly, perhaps the most important change overall is the shift from the pessimism and cynicism of the 1970s and 1980s concerning the poor and government's ability to help them. If anything, the plummeting rolls have provided evidence that government can do something right. Instead of being enveloped in negativity, the noble pursuit of America's ideal of equal opportunity is once again benefiting from a connection with one of the nation's most powerful emotions: optimism.

Despite all the progress and optimism, significant questions and concerns remain. The new reality for the poor is clearly not without its flaws, including the increasing racialization of the poor, the worsening of the condition of the most destitute, and the questionable sufficiency of the jobs the former recipients are finding.⁷⁹ The public has perhaps been too focused on the number leaving welfare, and not enough on what is happening to them once they do. Some studies show that up to 40 percent of the former recipients are not working.⁸⁰ Many of those working are in jobs with low wages and little possibility for upward mobility, and their loss in benefits at times exceed their earnings from work, leaving them worse off.⁸¹ Most of the improvements hailed by the laws proponents have occurred during a time of economic prosperity, and recently with the economy in recession the welfare rolls have begun to climb back up. It is also clear that those that have remained on welfare are likely the hardest cases, with the most barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. For many of these more difficult cases, the five year lifetime limits on receipt are only now approaching.

Whereas the condition of the working poor has improved, low-income wages still do not meet living wage standards. The trend of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer has continued.⁸² And while record lows in the number of poor children should certainly be celebrated, 11 million children remain in poverty in the richest nation in the world. The poverty rate for single female-headed families remains over thirty percent. The relative value of low-wage jobs in the U.S. compared to the median wage still lag behind those in continental Europe.⁸³ Equal opportunity, in other words, remains an ideal, not the reality. More progress is necessary, and if progress is to continue, anti-poverty advocates must preserve the current focus on the gaps between the real and the ideal—namely the lack of living wages and the continued existence of child poverty—and utilize the discomfort of the public concerning these apparent violations of equal opportunity to push for additional changes. The primary threat to the continuation of the current environment resides in the development or return of coping strategies that would once again distract the public from closing that gap. While the 1996 law at least symbolically eliminated the power of blaming the poor and blaming welfare for poverty, they could certainly rise again, or alternatives could

take their place. Indeed, the coping strategy of avoidance is perhaps the most powerful at this time, as the nation keeps its focus on the war on terrorism and away from its unfulfilled promises.

Moving Forward

In closing, I would argue that a key aspect of preserving the new rhetorical climate will be to uphold the bi-partisan cooperation evident now for helping the working poor. As a communication scholar, I believe the polarization in the debates concerning poverty during the 1970s and 1980s significantly harmed the poor. For years, the dominant perceptions were that, depending on one's political preference, the Democrats were for the poor and the "evil" Republicans for the rich, or alternatively the Republicans were pro-work and pro-family and the "immoral" Democrats rejected both. Such assumptions only harm the poor and heighten the political barriers to providing them assistance. This analysis showed that more often than not presidential rhetoric concerning welfare and welfare recipients was rather flawed, either matching skewed negative public assumptions or allowing them to continue unchallenged. While the presidents deserve criticism for the inaccuracies in their portrayals, the end of welfare essentially made them rather irrelevant. The most important aspect of the new political environment for anti-poverty is that it is focused on the working poor, an exceedingly positive image for both the liberal and conservative ideologies.

In order to maintain this bi-partisan climate, both sides must come to certain realizations. Liberals must resist the assumption that conservative calls for work, family, and responsibility are some sort of code for attacking or controlling the poor or minorities. They must realize that family decisions are not merely personal choices, but have real economic impacts, and thus to encourage two-parent families and discourage out-of-wedlock births is not judgmental, but critical to the well-being of children and to the realization of equal opportunity. Liberals should also avoid focusing on the poor as powerless victims and instead embrace the conservative optimism concerning the potential of all Americans as long as they receive ample support.⁸⁴

Conservatives, in turn, must be more mindful of the gaps between the ideal and the real. Reducing welfare and replacing it with workfare will not be enough; the work must be stable, pay sufficient wages, have some long term potential, and not harm families. They must realize that the situation for former welfare recipients is more complicated than simply choosing to go to work, and that ending welfare and providing true opportunity will cost money, not save it, especially if the economy falters and jobs are not readily available. They must realize that not all of the poor are able-bodied, or sufficiently ready for work. They will also have to face their ideological dilemma of glorifying family values while at the same time requiring a single mother with young children to work.

Fortunately for the poor, both sides seem to accept many of these lessons already. Ultimately, the true ideal of equal opportunity is unfortunately an unreachable goal. Actual equal opportunity would essentially require the abolition of family and massive income re-distribution. Nonetheless, the quest to close the gap between the ideal and real as much as possible remains exceedingly noble, and, more importantly, rather feasible in the current political environment. The impact of the 1996 law and the increases in support to the poor in the years following have closed that gap for many poor Americans, especially those able to work, in part because the flawed and distracting negative image of the “welfare recipient” was symbolically eradicated. The next realistic step to closing that gap is to eradicate another category, the working poor. At that point, the American dream will be closer to reality than it has ever been.

Notes

- ¹ In a 2000 poll run by Lake Snell Perry & Associates for Jobs for the Future, for example, ninety-four percent of respondent agreed with this goal, eighty percent of them “strongly agreeing.” See “A National Survey of American Attitudes Toward Low-Wage Workers and Welfare Reform,” *Jobs for the Future* <<http://www.jff.org/jff/PDFDocuments/LWSurvey2000.pdf>> (April 2000).
- ² Nixon, *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1969* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 637 - 638. Also see Robert Asen, “Nixon’s Welfare Reform: Enacting Historical Contradictions of Poverty Discourse,” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 4 (2001): 261-79.
- ³ Richard Nixon, “Labor Day Message,” *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1972* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973), 850-51.
- ⁴ Bradley R. Schiller, *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2001), 207.
- ⁵ Rebecca M. Blank, *It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage, 1997), 145.
- ⁶ Interestingly, the benefit of having additional children has grown significantly with the addition of the Child Tax Credit and the expansion of the EITC. Yet both those programs are strongly supported, and the link to fertility decisions is hardly an issue.
- ⁷ Cited in “Dethroning the Welfare Queen: The Rhetoric of Reform,” *Harvard Law Review* 107 (1994): 2026.
- ⁸ Howard Jacob Karger, and David Stoesz, *American Social Welfare Policy*, 2d. ed. (New York: Longman and Associates, 1996), 254.
- ⁹ Blank, *It Takes a Village*, 145.
- ¹⁰ Robert Moffitt, “Incentive Effects of U.S. Welfare System: A Review,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 30 (1992): 31.
- ¹¹ Moffitt, “Incentive Effects of U.S. Welfare System,” 24.
- ¹² See Peter Gottschalk, Sara McLanahan, and Gary D. Sandefur, “The Dynamic and Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty and Welfare Participation,” in *Confronting Poverty*, ed. Sheldon H. Danziger, Gary D. Sandefur, and Daniel Weinberg (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 85-108.

- ¹³ Blank offered three reasons the data did not support the notion of welfare addiction: 1. little evidence of permanence, 2. characteristics of long term recipients suggest many would have major difficulty achieving economic self-sufficiency, 3. the reasons people go back after leaving tied to labor market inadequacy and family problems. See Blank, *It Takes a Village*, 154-155.
- ¹⁴ Blank, *It Takes a Village*, 156-157.
- ¹⁵ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "'Dependency' Demystified: Inscriptions of Power in a Keyword of the Welfare State," *Social Politics* 1 (1994), 4. Also see Fraser and Gordon, "The Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs* 19 (1994): 309-336.
- ¹⁶ Lucie E. White, "No Exit: Rethinking 'Welfare Dependency' from a Different Ground," *Georgetown Law Journal* 81 (1993): 1963.
- ¹⁷ "Table 11.3: Outlays for Payments to Individuals by Category and Major Program, 1940-2008," U.S. Budget 2003.
- ¹⁸ Theodore Marmor, Jerry Mashaw, and Philip Harvey, *America's Misunderstood Welfare State: Persistent Myths, Enduring Realities* (New York: BasicBooks, 1990), 85.
- ¹⁹ Blank, *It Takes a Village*, 83.
- ²⁰ The evidence is scarce to support the charge of fraud, and most errors are typically caused by social workers, not by welfare recipients. One study estimates that that actual fraud occurred in less than four-tenths of one percent of the total national caseload. See Karger and Stoesz, *American Social Welfare Policy*, 255, and Elizabeth D. Huttman, *Introduction to Social Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 170.
- ²¹ For such critiques, see Ruth Sidel, *Keeping Women and Children Last* (New York: Penguin, 1996); and Herbert Gans, *The War Against the Poor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).
- ²² Cited in *The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination*, 1999, using numbers from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- ²³ Blank, *It Takes a Nation*, 6, 84
- ²⁴ David Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty and the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), ix.
- ²⁵ Marmor, Mashaw, and Harvey, *America's Misunderstood Welfare State*, 1.
- ²⁶ Blank, *It Takes a Nation*, 133.
- ²⁷ Considering social policy scholars David Ellwood, Mary Jo Bane, and Peter Edelman were all in the Clinton administration (though none remained after the signing of the 1996 bill), it was very likely that he was aware of the gap between public opinion and more substantive research. To his credit, however, Clinton did spend more time than the others explaining welfare's perverse incentives more accurately in terms of explaining the difficult position welfare mothers were placed in and the relative unimportance of the actual welfare check.
- ²⁸ In their review of polling in 2002, Shaw and Shapiro have shown that a "striking decline" in the number of people who believe too much is spent on welfare. Greg M. Shaw and Robert Y. Shapiro, "The Polls—Trends: Poverty and Public Assistance," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (2002): 106.
- ²⁹ Gilens' research shows that media portrayals of the poor overemphasize the number of minorities, and under-represent the number of the deserving poor such as the aging and working poor. Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media, and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Other research make similar conclusions, including Rosalee A. Clawson, and Rakuya Trice, "Poverty as We Know It: Media Portrayals of the Poor," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64 (2000): 53-64.

- ³⁰ Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, 3.
- ³¹ Ruth Sidel, *Keeping Women and Children Last* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996); R. Spalter-Roth, B. Burr, H. Hartmann, L. Shaw, J. Braunstein, R. Dennis, *Welfare that Work: The Working Lives of AFDC Recipients* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1995).
- ³² Robert Asen, "Women, Work, Welfare: A Rhetorical History of Images of Poor Women in Welfare Policy Debates," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 6 (2003): 304.
- ³³ See "Public Views on Low Wage Workers in the Current Economy," *Jobs for the Future* <<http://www.jff.org/jff/PDFDocuments/LWSurvey2001.pdf>> (October 2001).
- ³⁴ Sar A. Levitan and Isaac Shapiro, *Working but Poor: America's Contradiction* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
- ³⁵ Polls cited in Robert Shapiro, "Cooler Passions: Welfare Reform Five Years Later," *Public Perspective* 13 (2002): 30.
- ³⁶ Johnson, "Remarks at a Meeting With the AFL-CIO Executive Council," *Public Papers of the Presidents, L. B. Johnson, 1963-1964* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 22.
- ³⁷ Richard Nixon, "Address to the Nation on Domestic Programs," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Richard M. Nixon, 1969* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 640.
- ³⁸ Carter, "Welfare reform: Message to the Congress," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1977* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 1451.
- ³⁹ Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1981* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1982), 110.
- ⁴⁰ Michael B. Katz and Lorrin R. Thomas, "The Invention of 'Welfare' in America," *Journal of Policy History* 10 (1998): 409.
- ⁴¹ Richard Nixon, "Special Message to the Congress on the Unemployment Insurance System," *Public Papers, 1969*, 496.
- ⁴² Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, 127.
- ⁴³ "The American Underclass." *Time*, August 29, 1977, 15. Also see Ken Auletta, *The Underclass* (New York: Random House, 1982).
- ⁴⁴ Paul A. Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane, "Ghetto Poverty in the United States, 1970-1980," in *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson, pp. 235-273 (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991).
- ⁴⁵ Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 120.
- ⁴⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Undocumented Aliens Message to the Congress," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Jimmy Carter, 1977* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978), 1420; Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a White House Ceremony Marking the First Anniversary of the Report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Ronald Reagan, 1984* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), 685.
- ⁴⁷ Jack E. White, "Let Them Eat Birthday Cake: Clinton's Welfare Reform Dismays the President's Favorite Scholar," *Time*, September 2, 1998. William Julius Wilson, "The Underclass: Issues, Perspectives, and Public Policy," in *The Ghetto Underclass: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. William Julius Wilson, (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1993), 1-24.

- ⁴⁸ Bill Clinton, "Remarks to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce National Business Action Rally," *Public Papers of the Presidents, Bill Clinton, 1993, Vol. I*, 192.
- ⁴⁹ "Welfare Reform," *CQ Researcher* 11 (August 3, 2001).
- ⁵⁰ Peter Edelman, "Toward a Comprehensive Antipoverty Strategy: Getting Beyond the Silver Bullet," *Georgetown Law Journal* 81 (June 1993): 1706-07.
- ⁵¹ Robert Asen, *Visions of Poverty: Welfare Policy and Political Imagination* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2002), 8.
- ⁵² Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*.
- ⁵³ See Marieke De Goede, "Ideology in the US Welfare Debate: Neo-Liberal Representations of Poverty," *Discourse & Society* 7 (1996): 317-357; and William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton*, 2d ed. (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- ⁵⁴ James B. Stiff and Paul A. Mongeau, *Persuasive Communication*, 2d ed. (New York: Guilford, 2003), 80. Also see Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), and E. Harmon-Jones, "A Cognitive-Dissonance Theory Perspective on Persuasion," in *The Persuasion Handbook*, ed. J.P. Dillard and M. Pfau (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2002), pp. 99-116.
- ⁵⁵ Fritz Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958).
- ⁵⁶ Edward E. Jones and Richard E. Nisbett. "The Actor and the Observer: Divergent Perceptions of the Causes of Behavior," in *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior*, ed. Edward E. Jones (Morristown, N.J.: General Learning Press, 1971), pp. 79-94.
- ⁵⁷ Robert P. Abelson, "Modes of Resolution of Belief Dilemmas," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 3 (1959): 345.
- ⁵⁸ B.L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of Apologia," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1973): 280.
- ⁵⁹ As way of examples of the various modes of resolution, consider the inconsistency between an individual believing in the importance of good health and committing the inconsistent behavior of smoking cigarettes. Smokers, for example, may deny that smoking is actually detrimental to their health, or they may simply seek to avoid messages concerning the health effects of smoking, thus minimizing the salience of the inconsistency. They could bolster by focusing on how smoking calms them, improves their social life, and otherwise gives them satisfaction. They could use projection by pointing to tobacco companies that purposely increased levels of nicotine in cigarettes in order to cause addiction. Smokers can use differentiation by focusing on the fact that they only smoke one pack a day, not two; only smoke socially, not continuously; or only smoke tobacco, and not crack cocaine. Lastly, smokers may transcend the unhealthiness of smoking by telling themselves that fate decides life and death, and they may very well get run over by a bus the next morning, so what difference would another cigarette make?
- ⁶⁰ David Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War on Poverty: A Rhetorical Autopsy* (Ph.D Dissertation, Northwestern University, 1974), 895-96.
- ⁶¹ DeParle, for example, argues that the "civic climate has changed" and that the "silence of the liberals is particularly unfortunate because this should be a moment of opportunity. The poverty rate is falling. Employment is reaching historic highs. Ghetto life, though still steeped in grief, is finally showing signs of improvement. With the deficit gone, there is money to spend for the first time in 30 years. Faith in government is on the rise. . . Still, it is striking how little liberals have to say about the poor while conservatives glow and boast. . . rather than simply warning about the coming failure of welfare reform, they should try to build on its successes to achieve a bigger victory." See Jason DeParle, "Silence of the Liberals," *Washington Monthly*, April 1999, 17.

- ⁶² Rebecca Blank, "Fighting Poverty: Lessons from Recent U.S. History," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14 (Spring 2000): 4.
- ⁶³ Douglas J. Besharov, and Peter H. Rossi, "Conclusion," in *Family and Child Well-Being after Welfare Reform*, ed. Douglas J. Besharov (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 281.
- ⁶⁴ "The Welfare to Work Partnership's Report to the President on Welfare to Work," *Welfare to Work* <<http://www.welfaretowork.org>> (1999).
- ⁶⁵ Rebecca M. Blank and David Ellwood, "The Clinton Legacy for America's Poor," in *American Economic Policy in the 1990s*, ed. Jeffrey Frankel and Peter Orszag (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 753-4.
- ⁶⁶ George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President in Commencement Address, University of Notre Dame," *The White House* <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/05/text/20010521-1.html>> (May 21, 2001).
- ⁶⁷ Robert Greenstein, "The Changes in New Tax Law Makes in Refundable Tax Credits for Low-Income Working Families," *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* <<http://www.cbpp.org/6-14-01tax.htm>> (June 18, 2001).
- ⁶⁸ David Ellwood, "Anti-Poverty Policy for Families in the Next Century: From Welfare to Work – and Worries," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14 (2000): 191.
- ⁶⁹ Deborah I. Kobes, and Elain M. Maag, "Tax Burden on Poor Families Has Declined over Time," *Urban Institute* <<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=1000454>> (February 3, 2003).
- ⁷⁰ "Welfare Reform," *CQ Researcher* 11 (August 3, 2001).
- ⁷¹ Karlyn H. Bowman, "Attitudes about Welfare Reform," *AEI Studies in Public Opinion*. <http://www.aei.org/publications/pubID.14885/pub_detail.asp> (March 6, 2003).
- ⁷² A 2001 poll conducted for the Jobs for the Future organization, for example, showed that on the question of supporting "tax cuts to businesses that provide training to low-skilled workers," 91% of Democrats and 92% of Republicans agreed, on the question of increased funding for education and training for jobless, 96% of Democrats and 85% of Republicans agreed, on the question of "Expanding programs that help low-income working parents pay for child care, 94% of Democrats and 85% of Republicans agreed, and on the question of "helping low-income working adults pay for career-related college programs," 90% of Democrats and 79% of Republicans agreed. See "Public Views on Low Wage Workers in the Current Economy."
- ⁷³ Greg M. Shaw and Robert Y. Shapiro, "The Polls—Trends: Poverty and Public Assistance," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 66 (2002), 107. Also see Robert Y. Shaw, "Cooler Passions: Welfare Reform Five Years Later," *Public Perspective* 13 (2002), 26-30.
- ⁷⁴ Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, 4.
- ⁷⁵ Jane Tanner, "Living-Wage Movement," *CQ Researcher* 12 (September 27, 2002).
- ⁷⁶ Asen, *Visions of Poverty*, 242.
- ⁷⁷ Blank and Ellwood, "Clinton's Legacy for the Poor," 793.
- ⁷⁸ Alice O' Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-century U.S. History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 4.
- ⁷⁹ See Laura Meckler, "Survey Indicates Welfare Overhaul May Be Leaving Minorities Behind," *Houston Chronicle*, March 30, 1999, 7A; and "Study Says Welfare Changes Made the Poorest Worse Off," *New York Times*, August 23, 1999, A13. The second article details a study performed by the Center for

Budget and Policy Priorities, which is run by Wendell Primus, who had resigned from the Clinton administration to protest the 1996 bill.

⁸⁰ Welfare Reform,” *CQ Researcher* 11 (August 3, 2001).

⁸¹ Peter Edelman, “Reforming Welfare—Take Two,” *Nation*, February 4, 2002, 14.

⁸² Examining census figures, Doug Henwood has argued that incomes “haven’t been this polarized in seventy years.” Doug Henwood, *After the New Economy* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 89.

⁸³ John Myles and Jill Quadango report that low-wage jobs in the U.S. pay 40 percent of the median wage, whereas in continental Europe they pay 70 percent of the median. John Myles and Jill Quadango, “Envisioning a Third Way: The Welfare State in the Twenty-First Century,” *Contemporary Sociology* 29 (2000): 160.

⁸⁴ Such an argument was made by Jason Deparle in 1999. He argued that for a variety of reasons, liberalism had developed a pessimistic implied message about the poor, essentially argued that not much should be expected from them. As the liberal voice grew “muffled and gloomy,” Deparle wrote, conservatives “traveled in the opposite path, away from their historic position of resignation or apathy (‘the poor ye have always with ye’) toward a professed optimism about the inner-city poor.” See Jason Deparle, “The Silence of the Liberals,” 14.

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